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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ADULT LITERACY

BY

WILLIAM T. FAGAN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

(SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY)

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT THEY HAVE READ, AND RECOMMEND TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH FOR ACCEPTANCE, A THESIS ENTITLED A Social Psychological Conceptualization of Adult Literacy SUBMITTED BY William T. Fagan IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Education.

Dr. John G. Paterson

Dr. Harvey W. Zingle

Dr. D. Al MacKay

Date: March 26, 1991

DEDICATION

TO

Dr. Marian D. Jenkinson

with whom I had the good fortune to study on my first master's and my doctorate program, who epitomized research, learning, and scholarship, who instilled both the excitement and integrity of the research process, and who unselfishly promoted the scholarship of her students.

ABSTRACT

Within the past five years there has been considerable emphasis by government and other agencies to publicize the issue of adult literacy, and to a lesser extent to provide instructional opportunities for low-literate adults. The effectiveness and efficiency of such efforts is hampered by lack of consensus as to what adult literacy means. Discrepancies occur in the basic concepts underlying literacy surveys and policies.

One reason for the confusion underlying the meaning of adult literacy is the prevalence of many definitions which tend to reflect a narrow portion of the field and to reflect a particular bias or philosophy. The purpose of this study was to provide a framework or conceptualization within which a number of concepts in the adult literacy field were interrelated in order to allow for a more meaningful interpretation of adult literacy. This conceptualization was approached from a social psychological stance since both social (including political and economic) and psychological constructs have been frequently used to provide an understanding of adult literacy. However, the uniqueness of the conceptualization provided in this thesis is that, rather than describing such constructs sequentially and independently, an attempt is made to show literacy as a unity involving both social and psychological constructs with interrelationships within and across constructs.

The particular conceptualization is referred to as a Trait-State Model which is based on various psychological and social constructs from the research literacy on adult literacy:

- literacy as skill/process development
- beliefs and attributions
- interpersonal relations
- literacy interactions within social contexts

These constructs are interwoven with constructs from the psychological literature (especially social psychology, personality, and psychopathology) in order to provide a perspective of adult literacy as being both intrinsic to the person and relative to the contexts in which the individual must function.

A Trait-State Model of adult literacy has implications for policy making, program development, literacy assessment, and in understanding the constructs of adaptation and empowerment as complementary rather than as conflicting goals in literacy development.

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Indirectly, I am indebted to the prison inmates who were participants in a previous research study, and who quickly made me realize that to try and understand literacy in relation to prison inmates without an attempt to understand the complexity of their personalities and their environments (both within and without the prison walls) would do a disservice both to the prisoners and to literacy.

I greatly appreciate the expert advice and caring of Dr. John Paterson, whom I was fortunate to work with as my program advisor and thesis supervisor. Getting to the "issue" was always easy with Dr. Paterson's direction.

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING ADULT LITERACY: A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL

Thrusts to promote adult literacy among the general population have been present since the turn of the century. Alfred Fitzpatrick's founding of the Reading Tent Association, later to become known as Frontier College in 1899 and Cora Stewart's concept of "moonlight schools" in Kentucky in 1911, which scheduled classes on nights when there was enough moonlight to travel to and from class after work, are examples (Newman and Beaverstock, 1990). However, it has only been since the mid-1980's that a more concerted national thrust in both the United States and Canada has been evident.

> America changed its mind for the better about adult literacy during the 1980's. We have been brought by the adult literacy movement from a slight (but growing) awareness of the problem of illiteracy in the previous generation to national recognition of the literacy needs of adults. Now we are ready to affirm full literacy as a value that we cannot do without (p. 1).

This "national recognition" of literacy was due in part to media campaigns sponsored by the National Coalition for Literacy, an umbrella organization comprised of eleven charter organizations, including such groups as The American Library Association, The American Association for Advertising Agencies, and The International Reading Association.

The increased visibility of adult literacy in Canada is evident from a number of sources. In October, 1986 in the Speech from the Throne, the Federal Government committed itself to national action on adult literacy (Canada, House of Commons, 1986). Two years later the Federal Government created a National Literacy Secretariat and pledged $110 million over a five year period to combat illiteracy (White, 1990). The Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy was founded in 1985; a major aim of this organization was to promote an awareness of the impacts of low literacy levels on participation and functioning in the workplace (Ritts, 1986). In 1987, the publication of the document, Literacy in Canada: A Research Report by Southam News reported the results of a study on literacy in Canada sponsored by Southam News at a cost of $295,000.00. The central message was that about one-quarter of Canadian adults were illiterate. In a companion text, Broken Words: Why Five Million Canadians Are Illiterate, Calamai (1988) documented the results of the survey in more sensational language. Most of the excerpts in that booklet had already been widely circulated through newspapers in the Southam Newspaper chain. The release of a literacy survey by Statistics Canada in 1990 which indicated that as many as 38 percent of adult Canadians did "not have sufficient skills to cope with more complex reading contexts" (p. 3) was considered by many as a validation of the findings of the Southam News study. Finally, 1990 was designated International Literacy Year by

the United Nations General Assembly which was marked in Canada by projects ranging from literacy research projects, and program development to contests, and flag raising ceremonies. The culmination of International Literacy Year in Alberta included the release of a draft document on adult literacy policy (Government of Alberta, 1990), the only such policy to be proposed among the Federal, ten Provincial, and two Territorial Governments.

Adult Literacy: A Definition

While there appears to be agreement on the need to highlight adult literacy as an issue, there seems to be much less agreement on what adult literacy means. The implications of not having a common framework for understanding adult literacy is aptly expressed by Venezky, Wagner, and Ciliberti (1990).

> Social concepts such as literacy and poverty are integrally tied to their labels. Like jelly and sand, they are without intrinsic shape, defined and redefined by the vessels that hold them. Who is literate depends upon how we define literacy - whether it is a minimal ability, evidenced by the oral pronunciation of a few simple lines from a primer, or a more advanced complex of skills, requiring numeracy, writing and reading together (p. ix).

The resulting confusion of who and who is not literate (how many, and on what grounds) becomes even more confusing as one reads the various brochures and documents on literacy. For example, a publication by the International Literacy Year Secretariat of UNESCO, ILY: Year of Opportunity (1990) provides statistics on the illiteracy

rates of adults 15 years and over. The 1990 and projected rates for the year 2000 are reproduced in Table 1.

Table 1

Adult Illiteracy Rates

	1990	2000
World	26.9	22.0
Developing Countries	35.1	28.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	52.7	40.3
Arab States	48.7	38.1
Latin America/Caribbean	15.2	11.3
Eastern Asia	24.0	17.0
Southern Asia	53.8	45.9
Developed Countries	4.4	2.3

The figures given in the document are based on defining a literate adult as one "who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (sic) everyday life" (p. 8). According to the Southam News study (1987) eight percent of Canadian adults are basic illiterates who can barely read and write, while according to the Statistics Canada survey (1990), "The reading skills of 16 percent of Canada's adults are too limited to allow them to deal with the majority of written material encountered in everyday life" (p. 3). Can the figures from the above three sources be interpreted on common grounds? If so, questions need to be answered. Why is the rate of the Statistics Canada study

double those of the Southam News study? Why is the rate of the Southam News study double those for Developed Countries (Canada is considered a developed country) as reported by UNESCO? If such statistics were submitted as part of a thesis/dissertation or a scholarly paper without explanation, they would readily be dismissed.

The purpose of this study was to show through an analysis of selected, self-authored papers how adult literacy can be meaningfully conceptualized from a social psychological perspective.

Adult Literacy Definition: A Source of Confusion

Park (1981) describes "the field of adult literacy (as) large in scope, ill defined and draws from a variety of disciplines" (p. 279). In addition Brese (1990) showed that the orientation of the literacy stakeholder (practitioner, administrator, academic) is a factor in how literacy is defined. She found that while practitioners were likely to define literacy in terms of its functionality or use for the adult learners, academics, on the other hand, were more likely to conceptualize literacy as a level of expertise in reading and writing skills.

Clark (1984) proposed four categories of definition for examining adult literacy: traditional, statistical, functional, and contextual. Literacy as a traditional definition would have as a referent a minimal ability in reading and writing. The UNESCO definition of a literate as one "who can with understanding both read and write a short

simple statement on his (sic) everyday life" (International Literacy Year Secretariat of UNESCO, 1990, p. 8) exemplifies a traditional definition. Such a definition is also implied by the title of an article in a publication by the International Reading Association. The title is, "Conversations with a New Literate" and the article begins "What follows is an unexpurgated interview with an eighteen year old prisoner soon after he learned to read and write" (Amoroso, 1986, p. 484).

A statistical definition of literacy usually refers to the number of years in school. This is the generally accepted definition of Statistics Canada with the benchmark being set at nine; anyone with less than nine years of formal schooling is considered illiterate. A difficulty with this definition is that a certain number of years in school assumes a certain level of competency. It does not take into account individuals who have spent nine years in school but who only reached a grade five level of attainment, for example, or of individuals who left school before grade nine but who had developed their reading and writing skills to at least or beyond a grade nine level or of those individuals who left school prior to grade nine and who afterwards increased their reading and writing skills.

The functional literacy category is perhaps the most controversial in terms of lack of consensus as to what the features of this category should be (Levine, 1982). The UNESCO definition of a functionally literate person is one

who is able to "engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (sic) group and community and also for enabling him (sic) to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his (sic) own and the community's development" (International Literacy Year Secretariat of UNESCO, 1990, p. 8). On the following page of that UNESCO document are listed specific functional tasks that characterize the literate. This description is reproduced as follows from page 9 of the document:

* read the labels on cans and boxes of food
* read a bus or train schedule
* look up numbers in a telephone directory
* read a contract, health insurance form, deed, or waiver
* read a map when they are lost
* read medical directions
* help their children with homework
* read the menu in a restaurant
* read road signs
* get a job requiring reading or writing
* read the warning labels on poisons and pesticides
* read a letter from a relative or friend and write a response
* keep their own accounts

Clark's final category of definition is contextual which characterizes literacy tasks relative to the individual. While Hunter and Harman (1979) consider their

definition functional, it tends to reflect Clark's notion of literacy as contextual. Hunter and Harman state their definition of literacy as:

> the possession of skills perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups to fulfill their own self-determined objectives as family and community members, citizens, consumers, job holders, and members of social, religious, and other associations of their choosing. This includes the ability to obtain information they want and to use that information for their own and others' well being; the ability to read and write adequately to satisfy the requirements they set for themselves as being important for their own lives; the ability to deal positively with demands made on them by society; and the ability to solve the problems they face in their daily lives (Hunter and Harman, 1979, p. 9).

Charnley and Jones (1979) go a step beyond Hunter and Harman in terms of the relativity of literacy functioning. It is their contention that "an illiterate adult is an adult who thinks he/she has a reading or writing problem" (Charnley and Jones, 1979, p. 171).

Connotational features. The above definitions reflect denotational meanings for adult literacy. The adult literacy field is fraught with connotational meanings, usually for the label "literate (illiterate)" as opposed to "literacy". For example, Newman and Beaverstock (1990) describe adult illiterates as people who

> to the degree of their illiteracy (are) not free; they are personally and politically restricted. Although they may be smart, wise, and witty, they are enslaved by ignorance and excluded from full participation in the social, political, and cultural processes of society (pp. 23-24).

They further state that "Food for the mind and the gold of literacy in their pocket - these are rock-solid values for the newly literate" (p. 7).

People who do not acquire this "food for the mind" and "gold for the pocket" are often described in less than complimentary terms.

Fairbairn (1987) gives as an example of illiterates, "farmers failing themselves, their families and their land because they cannot keep up in an increasingly complex and technical industry, where, to keep abreast of change, you must read and understand" (p. 597). According to Calamai (1988), "Darkness and hopelessness are usually their (the illiterates') banners" (p. 7), while for Callwood (1990) the results of illiteracy are as follows:

> Loss of hope for oneself is a descent into dissolution without end. It causes men to rage in fury and women to wound themselves. People who can't read come readily to view themselves as worthless junk, and many feel they must grab what they can out of life. Canada's prisons are full of men and women who can't read (p. 41).

As Lytle (1990) suggests it is little wonder that people labelled as illiterate are considered as subordinate individuals or (borrowing from Kazemek) incomplete adults.

Plural literacies. Literacy, rather than being viewed as a unitary construct is often considered plural. Cook-Gumperz (1986) talks about "multiple literacies", while Newman and Beaverstock (1990) speak of "specific literacies". An analysis of the literature and of

discussions/comments on literacy in the printed media provided the following list of literacies:

Cultural literacy

Civic literacy

Ecological literacy

Scientific literacy

Musical literacy

Computer literacy

Moral literacy

Religious literacy

Visual literacy

Financial literacy

Technological literacy

Fiscal literacy

Automotive literacy

Xerox literacy

Amish literacy

Emergent literacy

General literacy

Basic literacy

Functional literacy

Advanced literacy

Low literacy

Newman and Beaverstock's (1990) conclusion regarding this trend is that "If everything becomes a literacy, literacy itself is in danger of becoming lost among its hyperdefinitions" (p. 43).

Quantitative versus qualitative literacy. "Quantitative" is often used synonymously with "absolute" and refers to the practice of reporting literacy as a number. As Newman and Beaverstock (1990) state, the definition of literacy "for the census taker is different from its function for the applicant for funds" (p. 39). Clark's (1984) first two categories of literacy definition, and in some cases, the third, reflect a definition of literacy as quantitative. Clark's fourth category of definition (contextual) is directed towards literacy as a qualitative phenomenon, a relative characteristic. Unfortunately, literacy definition as qualitative is often rejected because of its difficulty of management by statisticians and researchers. Park (1981) expresses this point as follows: "Relative definitions of literacy, although theoretically more satisfying, are virtually unmanageable for the researcher" (p. 280). Cairns (1977) makes a similar point. While he acknowledges the meaningfulness of literacy as a relative construct, he chooses, because of manageability to discuss "Adult Functional Illiteracy in Canada" (Cairns, 1977) in quantitative terms.

Definitional implications. The two major literacy surveys in Canada (Literacy in Canada: A Research Report by Southam News, 1987, and Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities by Statistics Canada, 1990) have been most influential in determining the perceived state of literacy/

illiteracy in this country and are widely quoted by a variety of sources.

In the Southam survey literacy was defined as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's own knowledge potential" (p. 6). In order to operationalize this definition the authors of that study chose approximately 60 items based on a decision of a panel of judges about which reading and writing materials a literate Canadian should be able to master. However, while all of these items were used in the survey, only 20 (a form of 10 items and a form of 14, with a four item overlap) were used to determine who was and was not literate. Based on the results the authors categorized the individuals according to their level of expertise: basic illiterates, functional illiterates, marginal literates, fuller literates. The study also identified "false illiterates" and "false literates". The latter two groups were defined in terms of unexpected performance in relation to having completed nine or more years of school, or having completed fewer than nine years of schooling. While the expressed definition is couched in "functional terms", the identification of false illiterates and false literates indicates that the authors of the survey were not willing to ignore a quantitative measure of literacy. It is also interesting that the study identified "functional illiterates" rather than "functional literates" which is the term commonly used in the literature. An

implication of this reversal of terminology is that the 20 items selected as part of the two forms determine exactly what and what only is significant for Canadians to read and write.

While the Statistics Canada Survey also adopted a functional definition of literacy, it is phrased somewhat differently from the Southam Survey definition. For the Statistics Canada Survey literacy was defined as "the information processing skills necessary to use the **printed material** commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community" (p. 1). This definition unlike that of the Southam Survey identified three specific contexts in which literacy tasks might be encountered and did not address personal goals and knowledge development. Rather than using labels to identify cut-off points in the results, the Statistics Canada Survey established four Levels of literacy, ranging from difficulty dealing with printed materials to meeting most everyday reading demands.

There are three points of concern regarding the operational definition of literacy in both studies. The fact that a panel or group of researchers would select which tasks a nation should be able to read and write is questionable on moral and ethical grounds according to Kazemek (1983). The second point is that in neither study were the respondents asked if they had recently or ever engaged in these kinds of tasks, if the tasks indeed were

pertinent to their lives. Finally the tasks were not always "real life" tasks but facsimiles of such tasks.

Unlike the two national surveys, the Foundations for Adult Learning and Development Policy (Government of Alberta, 1990) defines literacy very specifically, "the ability to read and write" (p. 12). However, the report does state that such ability lies along a continuum and that literacy may be considered a basic skill that is focal to a person's ability to function in three other skill categories: communication, life skills, and production skills (p. 12).

In conclusion, one is inclined to raise the question "Is a common definition of adult literacy possible?" (the title of a paper by Cervero, 1985). Cervero responds that a common definition may meet the needs of some groups better than those of others. For example, a common definition would be welcomed by government funding agencies who would then be able to identify the exact number of "illiterates" and plan budgeting accordingly. However, a common definition would not work so well in community situations where literacy needs vary from individual to individual. Cervero's paper suggests a way out of this dilemma. Any definition of adult literacy should be viewed from a conceptual and an operational perspective. A conceptual framework should provide a mechanism, for understanding adult literacy as a unitary construct.

The problem is not so much a common definition of literacy as it is of specific definitions. The manner in

which this framework would be translated into operational terms would be relative to the key players in a particular context. The first essential step is to provide a conceptual framework for understanding adult literacy. This is the goal of this thesis.

Significance of the Study

The interpretation of a field depends upon a knowledge of its theoretical constructs. There has been considerable difficulty within the field of adult literacy in interpreting data regarding what literacy is and who is or is not literate. Much of this difficulty is due to the absence of a conceptual framework. The field of adult literacy is not lacking in definitions but in an integrative framework that examines and describes the relationships between the various concepts on which definitions are based. Scribner (1986), for example, provides three interesting metaphors in understanding adult literacy: adaptation, power, and state of grace. However, these constructs are discussed sequentially without examining and specifying the relationships among them.

The need for an integrative framework is indicated by Lytle (1990) who states that "we need to construct a richer, conceptual framework for inquiring into the many facets of literacy development in adulthood" (pp. 3 - 4). Lytle (1990) also suggests how such an endeavour might be undertaken.

> Building such a complex and elaborated framework for literacy development requires both re-

> examining concepts from the available literature and uncovering new conceptual categories by inquiring systematically into adults' experiences with written language in their daily lives" (p. 4).

In this thesis, the author proposes to identify concepts from selected papers which he has written on adult literacy and to re-examine these in the light of his studies in educational psychology, drawing particularly on the areas of learning theory, personality, social psychology and psychopathology.

Method

The methodology for this study may be considered as occurring at two levels. Within each of the papers in Chapters 2 through 9, there is a particular methodology presented for the study described. Except for Chapter 3, a common group of subjects is addressed in all of the studies.* In order to reduce redundancy across chapters, these two groups of subjects are described below.

There were 26 subjects in each group. A key criterion for their inclusion in the study was that they were functioning below a grade 9 reading achievement level. One group was selected from among prison inmates and the other from mainstream society. Prison inmates were defined as sentenced prisoners in a medium-minimum correctional institution, and were chosen from various units within the prison: general population, active treatment unit, and protective custody. Possible subjects were identified by the

* Chapters 4 and 7 address one or the other of these groups.

prison program coordinator and the various proportions were drawn on a first come basis provided they met the criteria of functioning below a grade 9 level of reading achievement.

Adults living in mainstream society were defined as non-institutionalized adults, that is, not living in prisons, mental or old age institutions. They were considered "ordinary" people who had freedom of movement and who could avail of such facilities as transportation, recreation, and social interaction not available in an institution. Twenty-four of these adults were chosen from four literacy programs that ranged from scheduled full or parttime classes to individual tutoring once or twice a week, to a drop-in center. Ten of the adults attended full or parttime classes while 14 received individual tutoring or attended the drop-in center. The remaining two contacted the researcher either through interest or on another matter and were included in the sample. Additional information on the sample is given in Table 2.

Since the purpose of this thesis is to provide a conceptualization of adult literacy from a social psychological perspective, a methodology for this purpose is also necessary. This methodology is based on content analysis and critical or reflective thinking, or as it is sometimes designated, critical reflection.

Table 2

Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristics	Mainstream	Prisoners
Population	100	300
Male/Female ratio	1/1	9/1
Native/NonNative ratio	1/6	1/3
Average CA	26	24
Average years in regular school	11	11
Reading achievement at time of study a	mid grade 5	mid grade 5
Range of achievement	grades 1-8	grades 1-8
Intelligence level b	at least average	at least ave.
Percent from middle class homes	57	27
Percent from foster homes	8	38

a) Reading Achievement Test: Individual Evaluation Procedures for Reading (Rakes, Choate, and Waller, 1983).

b) IQ Test: Slosson Intelligence Test for Children and Adults (Slosson, 1961)

Note. Because of time constraints the Slosson test was administered so that as soon as the average range of intelligence was reached, the testing was discontinued. That is, no ceiling was attained.

Meehan (1967) states that "Analytically, thought about human society comprises three elements: descriptions, explanations, and evaluations" (p. 8) which in turn, rely on a conceptual framework to give meaning and significance to the underlying facts as determined by the observer. The observation and analysis of message content (or

communication or text) in order to identify facts is within the domain of content analysis (Budd, Thorp, and Donohew, 1967).

Carney (1972), however, argues that the main purpose of content analysis is for inference making and data extraction not limited to quantitative measurement. He outlines the function of content analysis as follows:

> Content analysis ... is a general purpose analytical infrastructure, elaborated for a wide range of uses. It is intended for anyone who wishes to put questions to communications (pictorial and musical as well as oral and written) to get data that will enable him to reach certain conclusions. Some content analyses are more objective than impressionistic assessment of the same questions and materials. None are perfectly objective, though some approach this goal remarkably closely (p. 26).

Budd, Thorp, and Donohew (1967) suggest six stages for carrying out content analysis (p. 6). These are:

1. Formulate research questions, theory, or hypothesis.
2. Select a sample and define categories.
3. Read, listen, observe and code content via objective rules.
4. Scale items (if necessary) and arrive at scores.
5. Compare these scores with measurements of other variables.
6. Interpret findings.

Steps 1, 2, 3, and 6 are relevant to the present study.

The research question may be phrased as: "How shall adult literacy be conceptualized from a social psychological perspective?"

The sample or text consists of eight papers written by the researcher and all relate to the topic of adult literacy. These papers are presented in Chapters 2 to 9. The two overall categories are adult literacy, with the focus on literacy, and social psychology.

The implementation of Stage 3 varies from that given by Budd, Thorp and Donohew (1967) and is more in keeping with Carney's (1972) views. There is no intent to quantify units or entities abstracted from the various papers. The focus is on non-frequency counting, which according to Carney, "involves qualitative assessment of the significance of a single, an intensive, or an attenuated mention" (p. 39). Concepts related to adult literacy will be abstracted from the various papers and, these in relation to concepts from social psychology (some of which may overlap) will form the basis of the conceptual framework to be provided. Constructing this framework is the goal of Budd, Thorp, and Donohew's Stage 6.

Stage 6 may also be considered the most challenging. Carney (1972) states "There are no rules to tell anyone how to make the inferential leap (p. 41). It is in this context, making the inferential leap, that critical reflection is relevant. As early as 1933, John Dewey maintained that critical reflection was essential for the development of

human intelligence. Higgins, Flower and Petraglia (1990) define critical reflection as referring to

> individuals' self-conscious and critical thinking about their own ideas and processes as they work through an intellectual problem. We assume that reflection requires some level of awareness of task and of one's own approach to it; however, reflection goes beyond self-awareness: when individuals engage in reflection they use their awareness to critically evaluate their own thinking in order to achieve some goal (p. 1).

They suggest that critical reflection "can play an important role in helping (individuals) move out of knowledge-telling and into knowledge-transforming" (p. 3) - an important goal in this thesis.

Snow (1973) attempts to represent in schematic diagram the process of theorizing, a modified variation of which is relevant to understanding the underlying goal of this study. The modified diagram is shown in Figure 1.

According to Ball (1977) a necessary first step in theorizing is to understand present conditions (the papers in Chapter 2 through 9, plus concerns in the related literature reviewed in Chapter 1) - to provide "a basic understanding of (our)selves and (our) work" (p. 204). However, one must move beyond present conditions, beyond specific facts and experiences and recognize relationships. It is in this step of the process that content analysis moves beyond the identification and/or counting of elements to interpretation and inference.

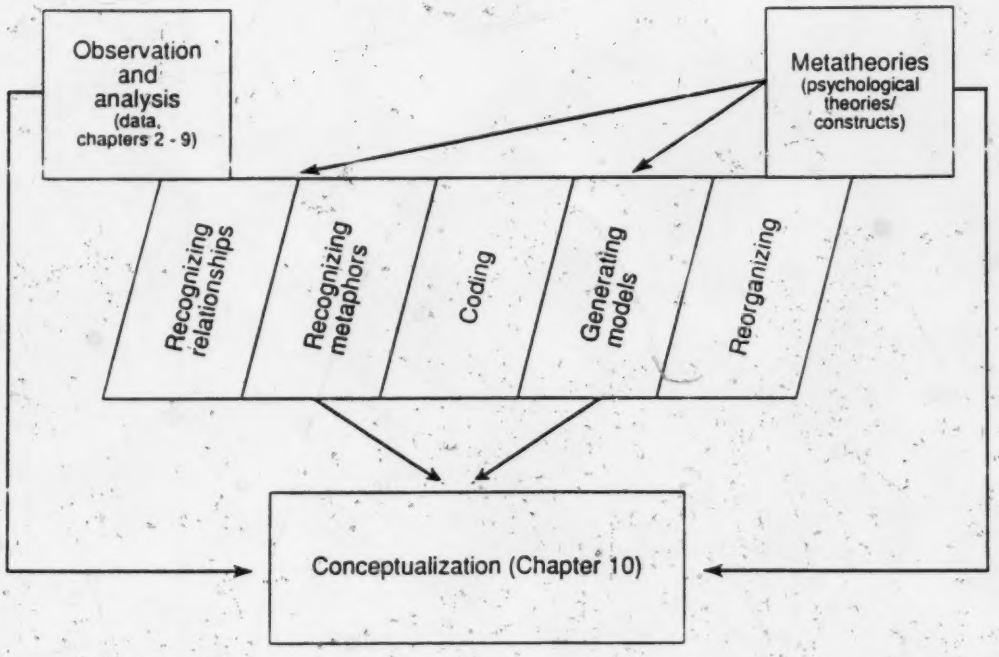

Figure 1: An Outline of the Process of Theorizing (Modified from R.E. Snow [1973], p. 88)

Recognizing metaphors, according to Snow (1973) fosters insight, a glimpse into another way of understanding. However, Snow points out that metaphors "are hardly sufficient and perhaps not always necessary" (p. 90). If metaphors exist, they must be transformed through coding into a formal representation system or model, which may be verbal, graphic-pictorial, geometric or symbolic-mathematical (p. 90). The model inherent in the conceptualization developed in this study is both verbal and graphic-pictorial

in nature. Models are subject to continued reorganization by one's metatheories which also influence the other steps of the process. Snow (1973) describes metatheories as "organized and sometimes reorganized collections of theoretical models. They influence the recognizing (relationships) and coding operations that produce metaphors and models, perhaps by constricting the perception and the model-building tools of the theorizer" (p. 97). In one sense metatheories may be considered as reflecting the dispositions or biases of the researcher since the researcher is guided by what he presently knows. In the present study the researcher is drawing on metatheories from various areas of psychology. While the label "social psychological" has been used, the researcher has taken the liberty to expand the definition to also include personality variables and psychopathology. Oskamp's (1984) definition of social psychology captures this meaning.

> Social psychology, briefly defined, is the scientific study of relationships between people. It develops systematic knowledge about people's beliefs, feelings, and behavior in regard to their social environment. (p. 2).

Delimitations

1. The conceptual framework in this thesis is based on eight papers written by the author and selected by him for this purpose.

2. The author has selected "significant" concepts from these papers to be included in the conceptualization of adult literacy provided in Chapter 10.

3. It is not the intention to pattern a conceptualization of literacy on a particular theory of personality; rather, the intent is to draw from the latter in attempting to provide a conceptual framework for understanding adult literacy.

4. The audience for whom the conceptual framework in this thesis is directed include literacy educators, policy makers, program developers, and researchers - not the literacy learners themselves.

   It is not the intention of the researcher to prescribe for this audience "<u>the</u> way" of conceptualizing adult literacy. Rather the focus is on "<u>one</u> way" and arises from the need to interrelate a myriad of concepts in the field, usually described in isolation and/or sequentially. It is hoped that this audience will critically reflect on their conceptualizations of adult literacy vis a vis the framework provided here and rationally select what will provide the best set of guiding principles for them.

5. The conceptual framework focusses on an understanding of "the nature" of adult literacy, and not on other aspects such as programming, instruction, policy making, evaluating, etc., although the framework does have implications for these areas.

6. Adult literacy is the focus of the study. However, insofar as data on child literacy are part of some of the papers reviewed, and the intent is to depict literacy as a unifying construct, these data are incorporated when feasible, and consequently, the resulting framework has many implications for child literacy.

Limitations

1. A limiting factor is the author's knowledge (empirical and reflective) at this point in time. The conceptual framework presented represents the author's current thinking.
2. The conceptual framework for adult literacy draws on concepts from psychology, particularly social psychology. To a certain extent these concepts may be loosely considered as analogies/metaphors. Consequently, it is necessary to be aware of the limitations of their use in constructing a model. Common errors in understanding analogy/metaphor use are listed by Meehan (1967). These are:
   a) attributing to reality what are only properties of the model;
   b) moving carelessly from model to reality resulting in unwarranted expectations;
   c) failing to ascertain the congruence between the model and the phenomena;

d) failing to bear in mind the partially and limited usefulness of any model or analogue (p. 33).

The Organization of the Thesis

This is a paper format thesis. In the first chapter, the author has set out the parameters of the problem to be addressed, including its significance. Chapters 2 to 9 consist of papers written by the author in the field of adult literacy. The final chapter, through a synthesis of significant concepts from the various papers, provides a conceptual framework for understanding adult literacy.

The chapters that consist of papers are intended to exemplify particular concepts pertinent for understanding adult literacy. Some chapters may be grouped for ease of understanding. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 relate to skill/process development; Chapters 5 and 6 concern adult learners' beliefs; Chapter 7 focusses on interpersonal relations, while Chapters 8 and 9 describe literacy interactions within social contexts. A synthesis is provided after each of these sections and "significant" concepts are indicated.

The goal of this thesis is to provide a conceptual framework for understanding adult literacy. Meehan (1967) uses the terms "conceptual framework" and "quasi theory" synonymously. He maintains that a key difference between these and a theory is that generalizations within the former are often "speculative" rather than empirically based.

It is not the author's intention to argue about the differences between conceptualization or conceptual

framework, model, and theory. The terms conceptualization and conceptual framework are used most frequently since these represent the overall or umbrella process of providing a framework for understanding a particular area. The term model is also used because of the graphic-pictorial representations employed in Chapter 10.

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CHAPTER 2

READING COMPETENCIES: THE PERFORMANCE OF LOW-LITERATE ADULTS*

The manner in which literacy is assessed will depend upon one's model of literacy. Street (1984), for example, distinguishes between autonomous and ideological models of literacy. The former is based on a set of specified skills independent of any particular social context, although clearly such skills are the domain of the school context. The ideological model views literacy in terms of uses which are influenced by social, political, and economic matters and distinguishes one society from another or one group from another. Heath's (1985) conceptualization also suggests considering literacy from the perspective of school-based skills versus contexts outside of school involving functional skills.

A key question is whether adults can competently function in a range of literacy situations outside of school. While there is a scarcity of studies on such competencies, possibly due to the difficulty of deciding on a standard of functional literacy (Levine, 1982), a number of studies have attempted to analyze materials commonly read by

* A version of this paper has been published.
Fagan, W.T. (1989). Reading competencies: The performance of low-literate adults. Reading Canada Lecture, 7, 16-27.

adults and to indicate the level of difficulty of such materials. Negin and Krugler (1980), for example, surveyed 302 residents of Milwaukee and identified twelve types of materials commonly read (bank statements, directions for preparing food, job applications, directions on products used for housecleaning or home improvement, street and traffic signs, directions on medicine bottles, applications for loans from banks, health and safety pamphlets, state and federal income tax forms, bills for goods or services, insurance policies, and size, weight, and price information while shopping). They analyzed the material in terms of vocabulary load and readability level. They concluded that the materials demanded a fairly high level of competency since "a sophisticated vocabulary and numerous writing and computational skills are needed to understand and complete the essential printed materials of the community" (p. 113). In another study, Holcomb (1981) analyzed the readability of fifteen health brochures which ranged from a grade 6 to a college level of difficulty, with five being beyond a grade 12 level. The difficulty levels of job materials ranged from grade 10 to 12 in a study by Moe, Rush, and Storlie (1979), and averaged at a grade 11 level in a study by Mikulecky (1982). On the basis of these studies, it seems that low-literate adults would experience difficulty with a wide range of printed materials.

Two important sources of information on the literacy levels of adults are the National Assessment of Educational

Progress in the United States (Kirsch and Jungeblut, 1986) and the Southam literacy survey (Literacy in Canada: A Research Report, 1987). The former rated 3600 adults between the ages of 21 and 25 on a composite score of four literacy scales. The overall rating was "adept" which was the fourth highest category and was defined as the ability to find, understand, and explain relatively complicated information. One of the scales was termed "document" and included ordinary, everyday reading tasks, such as job applications, and bus schedules. Items on the "prose comprehension scale" were more indicative of school type literacy tasks. However, since only a composite score was given it was not possible to determine performance by scale. In the Literacy in Canada study, 2398 adults from across Canada were assessed using a modified form of the NAEP tasks. Ten of these items (all but one from the document scale) were termed key items and were used to rate the sample in terms of degree of literacy competence. Eight percent of the sample were termed "basic illiterates" (fewer than three items correct); 16 percent were termed functional illiterates (fewer than eight items but more than three correct); 9 percent were considered "marginal literates" (eight items correct), and 67 percent were classified as "fuller literates (more than eight items correct).

In the present study two groups of adults who were functioning below a grade 9 reading level as determined by the Individual Evaluation Procedures for Reading (Rakes,

Choate, and Waller, 1983) were assessed in terms of their literacy performance on a number of functional reading tasks. In addition to understanding performance on functional literacy tasks compared to performance on academic literacy tasks, this study also provided for a comparison of the performance on these tasks between a group of adults in the institutional setting of a jail and a group of mainstream society adults.

This study investigated the relationships of "school" or "academic" literacy competency to "functional" literacy competency for two groups of low-literate adults. The extent to which these adults engaged in reading for purposes not related to specific educational programs was also noted. Functional literacy was identified in terms of its contextual use: environmental (traffic signs), consumer (sales catalogues), home related (TV guides), etc.. School or academic literacy was defined in terms of reading textbooks, answering questions, and completing worksheets. The work of Omaggio (1986) with second language learners suggests that language proficiency is best understood in terms of the nature of the individual's functioning across a number of communicative situations or contexts which results in a generalized performance. A proficient language user would be expected to perform on both academic and functional literacy tasks.

Method

Materials

Twenty-four ordinary reading tasks such as a TV guide, sales catalogue, utility bill, etc. were selected on the basis of a record kept by five households of the most frequent brochures/forms and other material which the household occupants read over a two-week period. These materials represented seven of the nine areas of frequently read materials as identified by Lichtman (1974): signs and labels, schedules and tables, categorized listings and indices, illustrated advertisements, technical documents, sets of directions, fill in the blank forms. The one area of Lichtman's list not represented in this study was maps; the final area "high interest factual material" was tested separately using a newspaper article. This manner of choosing the tasks provided for content and face validity. However, a limitation of choosing materials in this way is that although representative of "out-of-school contexts", the tasks were based on the literacy behaviors of individuals who were not part of the study. However, the individuals were not too different from the sample; in three of the households, only one individual had completed high school and none of the individuals had engaged in academic study beyond high school.

Procedure

One of the difficulties with assessing functional reading competency is that of preserving the contexts in

which literacy tasks occur. For example, a job application has a different contextual meaning in a testing situation than in a prospective employer's office. In order to make the assessment task as ecologically valid as possible, the directions consisted of two parts. The subjects were asked to (a) recognize the item by indicating what it was or where it would be found, and (b) access specific information. For example, after identifying a TV guide, the subjects were asked "What is on channel 12 at 4:00 p.m.?" Each subject was seen individually and all questions were asked by the examiner.

Results

Table 1 contains information on the subjects' performance in recognizing the functional reading tasks and in accessing specific information. Multivariate analyses were computed on task recognition (complete, partial, and recognition with probing) as one latent trait, and access of specific information (complete, partial, and with probing), as another. The recognition plus access variable (that is, when subjects could both recognize a task and access the appropriate information) was subjected to a t-test since scores were derived from the previous two variables. While the mainstream society adults were able to recognize fully just less than two-thirds of the tasks, compared to just over one-half by the prisoners, the dif-ference was not statistically different ($F=1.73$, $p=.17$). Questioning or probing by the researcher aided them very little in

improving their performance. The subjects either recognized a task or did not recognize it.

Both groups demonstrated less success in accessing complete specific information from a task than in recognizing it. For example, a subject may have recognized a utility bill, but was not able to find the "previous balance".

Table 1

Mean Performance on 24 Functional Reading Tasks

Variable	Prisoners	Mainstream Adults
Complete recognition	14.3	16.3
Including partial recognition	14.4	16.9
With probing	14.9	17.3
Complete access of information	12.5	14.9
Including partial access	15.7	17.2
With probing	16.4	18.5
Recognition + Access of information	8.3	10.8

However, in the case of accessing specific information, the mainstream society adults performed significantly better than the prisoners ($F=2.96$, $p<.05$). Information on an additional one-eighth of the tasks (or approximately three per subject) was partially accessed by both groups. For example, many subjects could only identify one or two out of three foods advertised on the front page of a brochure from a supermarket. As in the case of task recognition, probing

or guidance by the examiner did not help the subjects much in improving their performance. For example, when the subjects were asked to find an "entrée" on a menu, many asked what an "entree" was, and when they were told, they still could not locate the required information.

There were a number of instances when an individual could recognize a task and not access specific information (such as the previous balance on a utility bill) and vice versa, (being able to identify the words "present employer" but not recognize that this information was part of a loan application). The mean number of tasks that were recognized and from which the appropriate information was accessed by the prisoners was one-third, while the mean of the number of tasks so completed by the mainstream society adults was just less than one-half. The difference was not significant ($t=.25$, $p=.80$). The range of tasks independently completed by both groups of adults was very similar (2-16, 2-17). However, when the data were analyzed according to different cut-off points, a different picture emerged. Whereas the number of subjects who could independently complete 16 or more tasks was very few and did not differ much between both groups of adults (1 versus 2), 58 percent of the mainstream society adults could independently complete between 12 and 15 of the tasks; the corresponding percentage for the number of prisoners who could complete that many tasks was only 23.

Quality of Responses

In most cases the adults used the appropriate label in naming the tasks which they recognized, for example, "utility bill" was referred to by that label or as "bill". However, a significant number of responses did not include the specific label; for example, some adults referred to a grocery receipt as "something that comes out of the till" or "a list of the things that you buy"; a plane ticket was referred to as a "plane pass". These responses were accepted since it seemed obvious that the adult understood and recognized the particular item.

In their attempts to recognize a task, the adults always tried to make it meaningful even though it did not make sense in terms of the specific task itself. For example, a utility bill was described as a "math test", or "rules for running a house or an institution"; a notice regarding a Folk Festival was interpreted as a "poem" and a coupon as a pizza offer, or a "map".

While the adults knew that each task must be meaningful in their environment, they were often prepared to provide nonsensical responses when accessing specific information in response to a question. For example, in response to the question to read the want ad that began "Wanted people to make wedding supplies in their own homes", adults gave the following kinds of responses, "Wanted pearl wood supplants in their home", "Wanted petal winding subles in their home". "Powermate, heavy duty, chromeplated stapler" was read as

"powerment, heavy dunty, chrom plat", liberty yoghurt as "burrity young", and "festival" as "vestivally".

The items with which the adults had greatest difficulty were a food advertisement, bus transfers, a statement of earnings and deductions, and a plane ticket. Only one of the 52 adults was able to figure out the day of departure on a plane ticket. Easiest tasks included a TV guide, road signs, product labels, and shopping receipts. These types of tasks were also found to be easiest in the Southam Literacy Survey (1987).

Quality of Responding

Even when the task was eventually completed independently, some of the adults were extremely inefficient when doing the different tasks. It was most common for the subjects to take an inordinate amount of time to give a response. For example, several adults took three minutes or longer to find the previous balance on a utility bill. Inefficiency was also evident in the strategies used. At least one-third of the subjects read much more information than was required. For example, in response to "What is the high temperature for Edson?" in relation to a weather report, many adults read several paragraphs of print which eventually included the required information; they did not seem aware that the information was included in a column of temperatures. When they were asked to read "Do Not Pass" from a group of highway signs, many proceeded to read all the signs in sequence. They did not seem to have a concept

of the form or structure of different texts (i.e., the manner in which print for various purposes may be arranged); consequently, they did not know how to scan the text quickly to identify where the specific information would be located. About sixty percent of the subjects were not familiar with a person's surname being printed first on a plane ticket, and therefore, when asked who was travelling, they had great difficulty in providing the answer. The person's name was listed as "Danton, R". Many subjects substituted names like "Dan", "Denny", "Darren" and then decided that the ticket did not indicate the last name.

One other ineffective strategy involved the use of picture clues. A picture of a frying pan on a restaurant menu was recognized as an ad from a hardware store, and a picture of a plane on a bus transfer was recognized as a plane ticket.

Reading an Editorial

A short editorial (19 lines) about a terrorist attack on a plane was provided for reading and the following four questions were asked orally by the examiner:

1 What does carnage mean?

2 What does tarmac mean?

3 What does it mean that "the attackers must not be allowed to hide under the cloak of a political cause, real or imagined?

4 What does it mean that "authorities must redouble their efforts to enforce uniform standards of security worldwide?"

A suitable response to each question was weighted one point. Suitability of responses was judged by independent raters who were university graduates. There was 100 percent agreement. The total numbers of subjects who could answer each question were 3, 6, 12, and 5, respectively. There was little variation between the number of questions answered by prisoners versus mainstream society adults.

"Tarmac" was often defined as a "road", "tragedy", or "front part of the plane". "Carnage" was defined as "attack", "terrorism", "vehicle", or "to take over". One adult asked if carnage was a word from another language. While the third question was answered more often than the others, there were some misinterpretations such as "They cannot be hid by the government after they do it." The fourth question resulted in the greatest variety of answers, which were often cued by the words, "double" and "uniform", for example, "They must double the present number of security guards", "They must double check each person's baggage", and "There must be uniformed guards". While the subjects could talk about terrorism in general terms, they were not able to deal with the specifics. Their lack of knowledge of specifics was also evident on the passages of the reading test (Individual Evaluation Procedures in Reading) when the researcher asked them to tell anything

else they knew in addition to the information given. Perhaps an effect of illiteracy is that the nuances regarding a topic are not fully understood in a critical manner. Responding to questions on the editorial may be considered more typical of a school type task than of a functional reading task since it involved reading a short passage in order to answer questions.

Using Literacy

In order to determine to what extent the subjects read and wrote in their everyday lives (that is, outside of educational programs for those involved in upgrading programs), they were asked to list all the things they could remember reading and writing within the month previous to the study. After they had contributed their list, they were prompted, "Have you filled in any forms? etc." They were also asked to indicate if they had read or written anything the day of the interview, the day before, that week, or on other occasions (prior to one week, including responses of "Can't remember"). The data are presented in Table 2.

The mainstream society adults read or wrote a wider range of material than did the prisoners. They differed most from the prisoners, as might be expected, in reading "home related information - recipes, forms dealing with children's school, and sports activities", "job related information" and "reading children's books to their children". The mainstream society adults were also more likely to look at magazines, such as National Geographic or the Reader's

Digest "in the doctor's office". The prisoners, on the other hand, tended to write more letters and read more books, which may be expected, considering they have much more time on their hands to read books, and letter writing is the most convenient and economical way of communicating with family and friends. Although the prisoners tended to have engaged in reading/writing activities more recently than the mainstream society adults, there was not a great difference between both groups.

Table 2

Number of Subjects Indicating Nature and Frequency of Literacy Use

Variable	Prisoners (N=26)	Mainstream Adults(N=26)
Letters/notes	13	5
Books	8	5
Newspapers	8	9
Ads/notices/posters	2	5
Forms/schedules	4	6
Home related	1	10
Personal/diaries/journals	1	2
Reading to children	0	6
Magazines	0	2
Religious/Bible	2	1
Job related	0	7
	39 *($\bar{X}$=1.5)	58 ($\bar{X}$=2.2)
Read: today	10	5
yesterday	2	5
this week	2	1
other	12	15
Wrote: today	4	4
yesterday	4	2
this week	5	2
other	13	18

*The total > 26 as some subjects gave more than one response.

What is perhaps more significant is that almost one-half of the prisoners and more than one-half of the mainstream society adults could not remember when they had read or written something that was not part of an educational program. There is no doubt that some reading/writing events may have slipped their memories but their general unawareness of the range of reading and writing tasks indicate the lack of significance of such reading and writing in their lives. The prisoners, for example, were surrounded by print - there were regulation notices concerning their behavior, notices regarding opportunities for further education, notices on how to contact a lawyer or the ombudsman, newspaper clippings, directions in the kitchen, laundry, and other work places. Yet when asked if they read these, most replied that they had not. The prisoners were surrounded by print but were not involved with print. The behavior of both groups, and especially the prisoners, was similar to that of adults in studies by Fingeret (1983) and Lytle, Marmor and Penner (1986) who reported that the adults they interviewed did not have a significant need for literacy in their lives. There were always others they could call upon to fulfil this need. As Fingeret indicates, they operated basically by using oral language within particular social networks to achieve their goals.

Functional Literacy versus Academic Literacy

The correlation coefficients from a rank order correlation between scores on the functional reading task and the

academic reading task (IEP) were .62 ($p<.001$) for the mainstream society adults and .40 ($p<.05$) for the prisoners suggesting between 16 and 36 percent overlap in the variance of performance. This finding is similar to that obtained by Kirsch and Jungeblut (1986) for correlations between "academic" (prose) and "functional" (document and quantitative) tasks administered as part of the NAEP study. In discussing these data, Mikulecky (1987) concludes that there is little transfer of learning from academic or school type reading tasks to functional reading tasks. He believes that ability to perform on one kind of reading task does not automatically apply to another different type of task. He suggests that the degree of transfer may be increased if functional reading materials are included in adult literacy programs in addition to school type reading materials, emphasizing decoding, word attack, and literal level of understanding (p. 230).

Discussion

This study is different from others on functional reading in that it not only investigated the recognition of functional reading tasks and the ability to identify specific information on these tasks in response to questions but it also compared these results with the subjects' performance on academic type tasks. The data on Table 2 indicate that the adults of this study had considerable difficulty with ordinary everyday reading tasks that many people take for granted. The prisoners as a group had more

difficulty with the tasks than did the mainstream society adults. It may be argued that as a group, the prisoners by being in prison, did not have as much exposure to a variety of reading events. This is true to a point and emphasizes the importance of literacy environments for literacy development. However, it must be remembered, that these adults were not in prison all their lives; many of them had spouses and children and the average number of years they had spent in school was eleven. While the prisoners functioned at approximately the same academic level as the mainstream society adults, they were not as competent in reading materials from out-of-school contexts. They apparently had not transferred their school based skills to other types of reading in the same way as had the mainstream society adults. They were therefore at a disadvantage, for as Gavelek (1984) points out, the significance of the ability is in its application:

> It is not literacy per se, but the practice of literacy in certain contexts and in certain ways that <u>may</u> enhance an individual's cognitive development. In other words, it is not enough that an individual is able to read and write; one must determine both how and for what purpose these activities are put to use (p. 4).

The prisoners' difficulty in providing specific labels to describe ordinary reading materials suggest that such materials had not been an important part of their lives. They may be considered restricted in terms of the range of contexts in which they "practiced" reading.

While each literacy task in this study was always interpreted within a meaningful context (even if that context was not the appropriate one), the adults were often content to provide nonword responses to specific questions. The latter is reminiscent of school (academic) type literacy situations where the emphasis, at least in oral reading, is often on providing a pronunciation. Thus, these adults were behaving in a "school-like" manner in accessing specific information and may have actually been influenced by their school experience since one-half of the mainstream society adults and 70 percent of the prisoners indicated that they remembered being taught to read through a focus on "letters, sounds, and the ABC." Regardless of whether or not their nonword responses were influenced by their early school experiences, these responses show their lack of awareness of the meaningfulness or use of reading tasks in various contexts.

Even on occasions when the adults were correct in providing appropriate specific information, they were often inefficient in accessing this information. They lacked efficient strategies for analyzing texts. One might assume that if an adult takes approximately three minutes to locate a temperature in a weather report, it is unlikely that this adult would be inclined to engage in this kind of reading activity. In fact, both groups, were unlikely to engage in much reading activity beyond educational programs in which they were enrolled. The data for book and newspaper reading

are fewer than for the sample investigated in the Southam Literacy Survey (1987). In that study, 45 percent of the basic illiterates and 55 percent of the functional illiterates claimed to read a newspaper daily, while the percentage for both groups in the present study was about 33. However, as the Southam Literacy Survey points out, such reading was minimal and usually entailed the sports, horoscope, and TV listings. While the prisoners in the present study read slightly more books than the basic illiterates of the Southam study (33 versus 30 percent), they read far fewer than the functional illiterates of the latter study (64 percent). Only 20 percent of the mainstream society adults in the present study claimed to have read a book within the previous month.

The fact that both groups of adults had spent an average of 11 years in school and were both functioning on an average of between a grade 5 and 6 level, indicates that they were not successful in acquiring school/academic based literacy. Furthermore, the reading skills which they acquired in school did not always transfer to out-of-school tasks. The materials in this study may be considered easier than those analyzed in other studies (Holcomb, 1981; Mikulecky, 1982; Negin and Krugler, 1980) as the subjects were not expected to read and understand the complete document (except for the editorial). Rather, they were questioned regarding a specific bit of information, for example, "What is the high temperature for Edson?" Compe-

tency in literacy contexts beyond school is possibly influenced by the participation of the individuals in those contexts.

According to Cochran-Smith, 1984; Goodman, 1984; Harste and Mikulecky, 1984; and Heath, 1980; literacy takes meaning from the various contexts in which it occurs and in these contexts literacy enables the literacy user to achieve certain goals. Thus, in an environmental context, the person needs to locate specific information to find the doctor's office; in a consumer context, the person needs to acquire knowledge about the contract which enables him/her to decide whether or not to sign; while, in a personal/social context, the person replies to a wedding invitation to indicate whether he/she will/not attend. In general, these adults, and especially the prisoners, were not participating in a "literate environment" (Sulzby, 1981). Certainly the prisoners, in their present environment, were more removed from many literacy contexts than were the mainstream society adults and it may have been that prior to being incarcerated, they may also have been less involved in such contexts and at one point in their lives (their involvement in crime) decided to "opt out" of society conventions.

Implications

In adult literacy programs, the adult learners must be made aware of the many occasions for reading and writing in their everyday lives. Adult literacy programs should contain a range of print materials found in the adults' environ-

ments. Literacy programs should reflect the literacy opportunities which learners may engage in as part of living. Deford (1984) has suggested as much for teaching children:

> If we provide material that reflects the quality and forms of language found in print within the world around us, children in turn may come to value reading and writing because they have been approached as readers and writers rather than children who have much to learn (p. 79).

This statement is as true for adult literacy programs as it is for children's programs and especially so for prisoners who do not have the same opportunities as mainstream society adults to participate in literacy across a variety of literacy contexts.

For each literacy task in an adult literacy program, the conditions of that task, the when, where and why, should be clear to the adult learners (Paris, 1984). That is, adult learners should not be given worksheets to complete or questions to answer unless they can see how these are meaningful in other contexts. By providing for opportunities for the adult learners to become aware of the conditions of use for various literacy tasks, their relationship to the literacy program changes from that of dependency to that of control.

Being aware of a range of literacy materials and the conditions under which they may be used is of little value, unless the adult possesses the strategies for accessing information from these materials. This would entail their becoming aware of how information may be structured so that

accessing information from a weather report is not done in the same way as accessing information on a utility bill. Adult learners must also realize that information within such situations must be meaningful. They should realize the inappropriateness of responses such as "burrity young" or "wanted petal winding subles". They need to become knowledgeable of the various strategies for the use of context as well as strategies for word decoding.

Adult literacy programs should also be concerned with knowledge development which is necessary to provide suitable schemas or knowledge frameworks for understanding text. Current topics such as those from newspapers or TV may be used for this purpose. Information, however, should not be presented in a superficial manner as a number of facts of statements. Instead, various aspects of the topic may be pursued through discussion and adult learners may be encouraged and aided, if necessary, to relate information to other topics and to their own lives.

In case there may be some misunderstanding that the author is promoting adult literacy programs of a "functional nature" only, the author wishes to indicate that literacy may be best conceived within both an ideological and an autonomous model. Readers must have control over various forms of language in order to manipulate language for their particular purposes; that is, they must master certain basic skills or knowledge of reading and writing. Pearson and Tierney (1984) maintain that skilled readers should be able

to read by being thoughtful to self, to the author, and to the text. That is, learners must read to fill in gaps in their knowledge, to understand the author's purpose or viewpoint, and to appreciate the language and text forms used to convey meaning.

By adopting a model of literacy that is ideological and autonomous, the domain of the adult literacy programs would be extended to include out-of-school literacy contexts (including reading for enjoyment) and would also provide for autonomy of strategy use in the sense that learners must possess various strategies for manipulating text for cognitive/affective purposes. The challenge is to dovetail both types of models so that individuals eventually perceive literacy as a set of broad, generalized skills from which they can select and apply as appropriate to a variety of contexts. When literacy is developed within this kind of paradigm, individuals may be in a better position to attain literacy competency in a number of contexts while at the same time extending such strategies beyond particular contexts. In this way the adult becomes proficient in literacy knowledge and use. The adult is able to selectively use his/her literacy knowledge consistent with goals, tasks, and contexts.

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CHAPTER 3

ADULT VERSUS HIGH AND LOW READER PROCESSING CHARACTERISTICS*

Adult literacy programs are often selected based on the assumption that adult illiterates are similar to young children who are learning to read. However, little is known about the cognitive processing of adults (Arnove and Arboleda, 1977; Kavale and Lindsey, 1977; Lindsey and Jarman, 1984). Goodman (1982) states that reading involves similar processing for both beginning and proficient readers. Kazemek (1983) argues that in reading as in chess, the distinction between novices and experts is not that different cognitive processes are involved; "rather, experts make greater use of what they expect to see and are able to see" (p. 197) and Goodman maintains that meaning is what proficient readers strive to see.

The purpose of the study reported here was to examine the cognitive processing of a group of adult illiterates, a group of low achieving grade 2 readers, and a group of grade 4 proficient readers. A second purpose was to determine if the processing varied across narrative and expository (descriptive) text.

* This paper has been published.
Fagan, W.T. (1987). Adult versus high and low reader processing characteristics. Wisconsin State Reading Association Journal, 31, 57-63.

Method

Subjects

Twenty adults were obtained through the assistance of the coordinator of a literacy project using volunteer tutors for adults whose reading levels ranged between 0 and grade 9. Adults whose reading levels were about grade 4 level or below were requested since it is this group which is often ignored (Lytle, Marmor, and Penner, 1986). All adults received the Standard Reading Inventory (McCracken, 1966) and based on this test, their mean reading achievement level was 2.4, with a range of 1.9 to 3.5. None of the adults were considered mentally handicapped by the project personnel and their ages ranged from 21 to 60.

The school age subjects were obtained from a large urban school system. Twenty low achieving grade 2 students were drawn randomly from a population of 32 such children in the schools assigned by the school system. Their mean reading achievement level was 1.5, with a range of 1.3 to 1.7 as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test (1980) and were of average intelligence as measured by the Primary Mental Abilities Test (1965). All 22 grade 4 proficient readers who were available in the schools assigned were chosen. Their mean reading achievement level, also measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test was 5.7, with a range of 4.2 to 7.2. All were of average intelligence as measured by the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (1980).

The four schools which the students attended were located in middle and lower socioeconomic areas of the city. All adults and children were native speakers of English.

Procedure

All subjects read orally, passages from two informal reading inventories, in a one-to-one situation. After the reading of each passage, each subject gave a free recall. The narrative passages were taken from a reading inventory constructed by Cronin (1982) and ranged from preprimer to grade 6, while the expository (descriptive) passages were taken from the Individual Evaluation Procedures for Reading (Rakes, Choate, and Waller, 1983) and ranged from primer to grade 10. The content of both sets of passages focussed on animals. Passages at the instructional level were analysed in terms of processing and recall. Instruction level was defined as those passages on which the reader made 10 percent or fewer uncorrected miscues (unexpected responses, such as substitutions, omissions, insertions), and of which at least 75 percent resulted in no or minor meaning change from the authors' intended meaning.

Processing Analysis

The processes selected for analysis were influenced by the work of Goodman and Burke (1973) and included the following:

- Grapheme/phoneme association - the ratio of correct symbol/sound associations used in substitution responses.

- Synthesizing - the ratio of miscues to the total number of miscues that were semantically and syntactically appropriate within a sentence unit.
- Predicting - the ratio of miscues that were consistent in meaning to the meaning of the preceding sentence.
- Monitoring - the ratio of miscues that were corrected.

In addition to these processes, two aspects of meaning were investigated:

- Key units recalled - the ratio of key (clause) units that were recalled. Key units were identified by two independent raters as the approximately one-third most important ideas in the text.
- Erroneous recall - the ratio of clause units to the total number of clause units in the recall that were erroneous.

Results

In Table 1 are listed the means for the various processing and recall variables for both narrative and expository passages.

Processing Across Text Type

There was little variation among the three reader groups in terms of processing narrative text although the adults did engage less in using graphophonic input and in synthesizing meaning at a sentence level. However, all ratios except for monitoring, were above .50. When the

recall data are considered, the ratio for recall of key units by adults was greater than that for either of the children reader groups. Furthermore, erroneous recall by adults, like that for proficient readers, was minimal. The key information recalled by the low achieving grade 2 readers was offset by a .11 ratio of erroneous information.

Table 1

Mean Proportions of Reading Processes and Recall Data

	Low 2	Proficient 4	Adults
Narrative			
Use of graphonic data	.65	.64	.59
Synthesizing	.68	.59	.55
Predicting	.64	.60	.67
Monitoring	.31	.26	.29
Recall of key units	.47	.48	.58
Erroneous recall	.11	.03	.02
Expository			
Use of graphophonic data	.64	.49	.52
Synthesizing	.32	.41	.27
Predicting	.55	.59	.55
Monitoring	.19	.22	.24
Recall of key units	.28	.36	.48
Erroneous recall	.17	.02	.10

There was much greater variation among the processing of expository text than of narrative text. The low grade 2

students were using as much graphophonic data in expository text as in narrative, although the ratio for the other two groups, especially the proficient grade 4 readers dropped. All groups were much less effective in synthesizing meaning in expository text. The adults and low grade 2 students were much lower that the grade 4 readers in their use of this process. However, all reader groups were making a comparable attempt to predict meaning from the previous sentence,and in correcting miscues (monitoring).

The recall data showed that all readers were much less successful in recalling key information from expository text as compared to narrative text; the scores of the adults were higher than the other groups. However, the recall of expository text by the adult readers was confounded by the presence of erroneous data. The low achieving grade 2 readers were having even more difficulty in this regard.

Processing Profiles

Stanovich (1980) suggests that in order to understand the processing in which readers engage, it is necessary to look at one process in relation to the others, for as he states, readers interact with text in a compensatory manner, so that the use of a particular process at one time will mean less use of another process. The profiles of the readers for processing and recall are graphed in Figures 1a and 1b.

The graphs clearly show that the processing of all three groups of readers differ in quantity rather than in

Figure 1

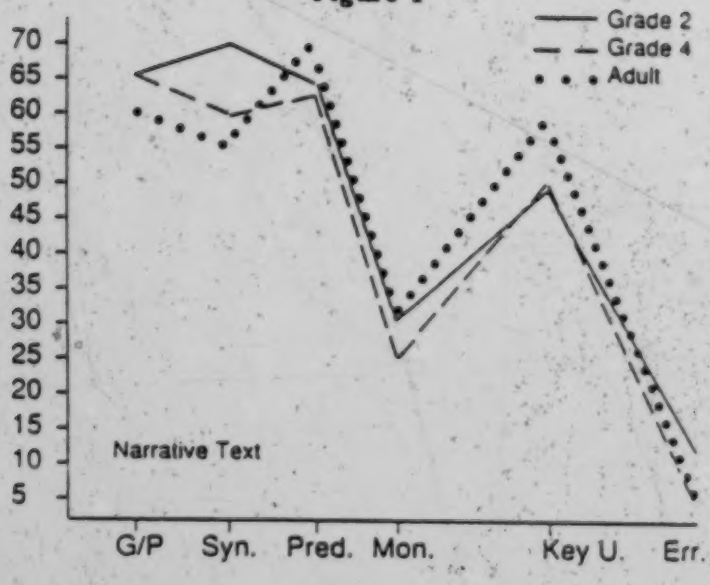

Figure 1a: Processing Profiles (Narrative)

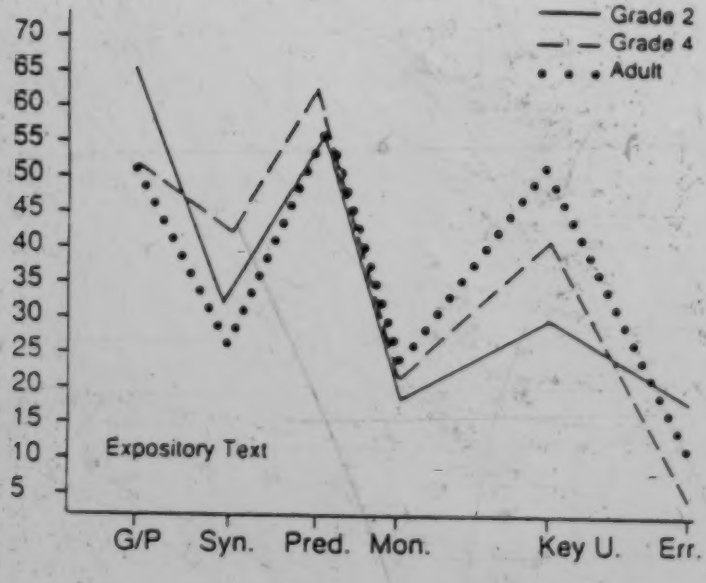

Figure 1b: Processing Profiles (Expository)

quality. The profiles within each text type are remarkably similar, with strengths in using graphophonic input, and in predicting; synthesizing was also used frequently in narrative text. While the recall profiles are similar across text types, there are greater differences among quantity of recall for expository text.

Discussion and Implications

While programs for low readers, including adult illiterates, tend to have a strong phonic base, the results of this study show that this is not warranted. There was little variation between the degree to which the two low reader groups engaged in this process in comparison to the proficient grade 4 readers. These results are consistent with those of a study by Cambourne (1983) who compared the processing of a group of learning disabled children with proficient, average, and low readers in grades 2, 4, 6, and 8. He concluded "that children suffering from a specific learning disability were not disabled because they failed to use as much graphophonic information as the other readers" (p. 17).

While all reader groups demonstrated similar profiles for the recall of narrative text, the adults tended to have a higher recall of key ideas without the presence of much erroneous information. Thus similar processing profiles do not necessarily lead to the same degree of recall. The differential recall may be explained by schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980). The adults, with more experience had more

knowledge to bring to bear to each reading task and consequently had more resources to construct meaning as they interacted with the text.

When reading expository text of a descriptive nature, all groups were engaged less in the process of synthesizing. It is interesting that the grade 4 proficient readers were most successful in utilizing this process and at the same time engaged less in using graphophonic information. The adult readers recalled more key information; however, this time one tenth of their recall was comprised of erroneous information. Thus, their background knowledge did not benefit them as much in expository text. This may be explained by the fact that the expository text listed facts about animals as opposed to telling a story; the lower degree of synthesizing in expository text indicated that they were not always making sense of what they were reading and this was reflected in the production of erroneous data at the time of recall. Reiser and Black (1982) showed that the different structures of narrative and expository text lead to differential processing. They maintained that in reading expository text, the reader's goal is to build or expand knowledge, while in reading narrative text, the reader accesses a schema in order to relate events in a causal manner.

The results of this study show that while adult illiterates and school age readers (low and proficient readers) use similar processing, the use of these processes

must be understood in terms of what readers bring to the text. Thus programs should make more use of the wealth of experiences which adults have. It also makes sense, of course, that the content of adult programs relate to their present life experiences and their needs. A reasonable assumption is that if the texts of this study had dealt with such topics as unemployment, marital problems, or abortion, the adults' recall would have been much higher than that of the children.

The results also suggest that narrative texts should be used at least in the introductory phase of programs since narrative has a well defined structure (setting, goals, outcome, etc.) and apparently readers are able to use this structure to synthesize meaning as they interact with the text.

Finally, the differences in processing narrative and expository text suggest that educators who use informal reading inventories to assess readers' reading processing/ ability, be aware of the text types found in informal reading inventories and especially inventories which interchange narrative and expository text over grade levels.

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CHAPTER 4

A COMPARISON OF THE WRITING BEHAVIORS OF LOW-LITERATE ADULTS, GRADE NINE AND GRADE SIX STUDENTS*

While the basis of adult literacy is usually defined as competency in reading and writing, only within recent years has the importance of writing being addressed. Darville (1987) maintains that writing (particularly expressive writing) by low-literate adults provides a situation for reflection and action - a means to empowerment. This view is also shared by Erdman (1984) and Hunter (1985). While reading may be encountered more frequently by adults, it is through writing that they have a greater chance for empowerment, a greater opportunity for bringing about change in their lives.

Developing competency and efficiency in writing requires various skills and strategies. These skills and strategies have been described within recent theories of writing (Graves, 1975; Flower and Hayes, 1980) and one would assume are reflected in the writing behaviors of successful writers. A comparison of the writing skills and strategies of successful and unsuccessful writers should suggest ways

* This paper has been published.
Fagan, W.T. (1990). A comparison of the writing processes of low-literate adults and grade 9 and grade 6 students. Australian Journal of Adult Education, 30, 76-83.

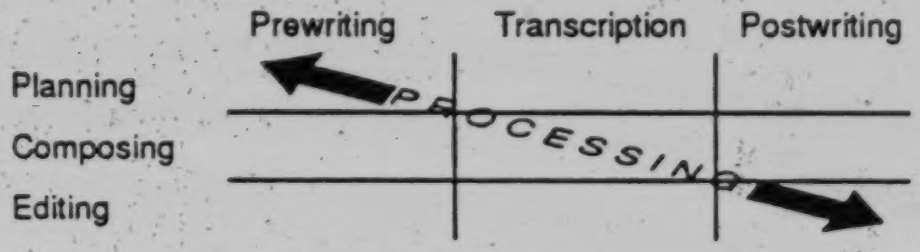
for improving the writing efficiency of the latter. Since adults have more and different experiences than school-age students, it might be hypothesized that they approach personal expressive writing with different skills and strategies than students who are comparable to them in reading and writing achievement. That is, while the overall writing products may be comparable, the efficiency in attaining those products may differ. In order to understand the writing behaviors of low-literate adults and to provide suggestions for improving their writing, the writing behaviors of this group were compared to those of two groups of school-age students.

The Writing Process

Writing is usually considered as occurring in stages and three stages are most often identified. Dyson (1984) refers to these as the time (a) preceding/related to the act of writing, (b) after the physical act begins, and (c) immediately following/related to writing. She considers these three phases of writing as constituting a writing event. Graves' (1973) stages are similar to those of Dyson. Smith (1982) discusses prewriting and rewriting as bounding the act of writing, which he defines as composing and transcription; Britton (1970) also refers to two stages which he calls premeditation and transcribing.

Writers engage in various processes as they write. Three general processes most often identified are planning, composing, and editing. Sometimes stages and processes are

considered synonymous, which is misleading. Planning, for example, is often equated with the prewriting stage. Flower and Hayes (1980) express the concern that by focussing on stages, one may be inclined to separate thinking and writing and perceive thinking as occurring before writing rather than conceptualizing both as inseparable. Since writing does take place during a time sequence, the best solution may be to understand writing as a stage activity during which writers engage in various processes, keeping in mind that the same processes may occur during more than one stage. The relationship between stages and tasks is indicated below.



Furthermore, the processing within stages does not take place independently of particular writing tasks. Planning for/during/after writing involves such cognitive tasks as topic selection, generating knowledge (using resources), setting purposes, selecting genre, delineating audience, verbalizing/sketching, and rehearsing. Composing may be considered the heart of the writing act since in evaluating the product, much emphasis is placed on those factors which

occur during composing. During composing, writers need to formulate thoughts, and record them. There may be times when the writer must search for further information. Revising/editing is integral to composing and involves decisions regarding the flow of thoughts such as synchronizing/extending, which involves the writer rereading in order to extend the text so that it is synchronomous with what has already been written. Revising/editing also involves making changes in the product. The writer may be guided by "constraints created by the linguistic conventions of written text (Is the text grammatically correct?), constraints created by the demand for integrated knowledge (Does the text present what I have to say in an organized, conceptually integrated fashion?), and constraints created by the rhetorical problem itself (Does the text achieve its purpose?) (Halpin, 1983).

Method

Sample

Three groups of 26 subjects each of low-literate adults, achieving grade nine students, and low-achieving grade six students, along with five other groups were part of a larger study on literacy development. The adult group became the focus of this study since little is known about how low-literate adults write. The achieving grade nine students were chosen because they were rated the most successful writers of all the groups, and the low-achieving grade six students were chosen because they were most

comparable to the adults in terms of reading achievement and overall writing performance.

The grade six students were chosen from eight classrooms and the grade nine students from seven classrooms in two urban school districts. Achievement was determined by scores on school district administered reading/language/arts tests (The Canadian Test of Basic Skills, and a School System Language Arts test for the grade six students, and The Sequential Tests of Educational Progress, and the Davis Reading Test for the grade nines). Correlations between scores on both tests for 18 students at the grade six level, and 20 students at the grade nine level were .91 and .93, respectively. Achieving students were defined as those scoring at least one-half standard deviation above the school district mean, and low-achieving students as those scoring at least one-half standard deviation below the mean. Only those students who maintained the same relative position with regard to achievement at the end of the study were included. Random selection was attempted along two lines: in some schools the principals wanted a quota of students selected randomly for whom permission was then sought from the parents, while in other schools an attempt was made to obtain permission for all eligible students and then randomly select from those for whom permission to participate in the study had been approved. There were 15 boys and 11 girls at the grade six level and 12 girls and 14 boys at the grade nine level.

The adults (equal number of males and females) were chosen from approximately 100 who were attending adult literacy classes or receiving individual tutoring. The first 26 who scored below grade eight level on the Bader Informal Reading Inventory were accepted. The reading achievement level was confirmed by the administration of the Individual Evaluation Procedures Reading Inventory. The mean reading grade level was 5.6.

The writing samples were judged according to a modified version of Cramer's (1982) rating scales for writing. One set of four major characteristics is provided for rating narrative writing, and a second set for rating expository writing. Within a maximum of 8 allotted points, the ratings for grade nine, grade six, and the adults were 7.1, 4.8, and 4.6, respectively. The interrater reliability by two independent raters for categorization according to the scales was 91.2 percent.

Procedure

Subjects were seen individually and were asked to choose any topic and write as much or as little as they wanted. Each was given a sheet of lined and numbered paper. Prior to transcribing the first word the researcher probed for reasons for selecting the topic, the extent of knowledge on that topic, and whether the subjects at that time knew how the text might end.

As the subjects wrote, the researcher timed their writing with a stopwatch to get an indication of the word/

time ratio for composing/transcribing. Also as the subjects wrote, the researcher tracked each word, noting any pausing and rereading. When they had completed writing, the researcher engaged in a discussion on whether the subjects had a particular audience in mind and how this affected the writing, and why or why not the subjects read over the writing on its completion. Selected places where the subjects paused were indicated to them and they were asked what they were thinking at that point. They were also asked to confirm if they reread as they wrote (if this behavior had been noted) and why. All discussion was tape recorded.

Results

Group Differences

Pertinent data are reported in Tables 1 through 4. In addition to the number of respondents for a particular behavior or means for a particular variable the tables also include the number of group differences (whether two or three groups differed) and the direction of the difference in terms of the adult groups, that is, whether the score representing the adult behavior was higher (+) or lower (-) in relation to the others. If the adult score was between those reported for grade nine and grade six, the symbol +/- was used. A difference between any two group scores/means was defined as being greater than one-half of the smallest score/mean.

The adult subjects differed from the grade nine and grade six students on 29 of 35 comparisons. They differed

Table 1

SUBJECTS REPORTING ON PLANNING ASPECTS OF THE WRITING PROCESS

	Ach. Gr. 9	Low Gr. 6	Adults	No. of Diff.	Direction re Adults
Topic					
Primary	11	17	25	3	+
Secondary	4	5	1	2	-
Extended	11	4	-	3	-
End Known Prior					
Yes	14	11	4	3	-
When End Known					
Last Sentence	15	15	13		
Second Last sen.	2	4	9	3	+
Earlier	7*	4	4	2	-
Genre					
Personal Narr.	9	18	18	2	+
Narrative	3	5	-	3	-
Descriptive	13	2	4	3	+/-
Exposition	1	1	4	3	-
Audience in Mind	3	3	-	2	-
Audience awareness	18	12	11	2	-

*Numbers sometimes don't add to 26 because some students couldn't remember

Table 2

COMPOSING/DRAFTING ASPECTS OF THE WRITING PROCESS

	Ach. Gr. 9	Low Gr. 6	Adults	No. of Diff.	Direction re Adults
Length in words					
X	125.9	83.2	55.6	3	-
Range	16-304	12-255	12-122		
Composing time (wpm)					
X	16.7	14.1	10.8	2	-
Range	9.7-22.7	6.7-43.5	4.8-25.7		

Table 3

REVISING/EDITING ASPECTS OF WRITING

	Ach. Gr. 9	Low Gr. 6	Adults	No. of Diff.	Direction re Adults
Pausing					
No of subjects	24	24	25		
X words between pauses	33.9	26.2	16.1	3	-
Range	8.0-93.5	5.7-81	4-82		
Rereading					
No of subjects	21	12	19		
X words between rereads	49.5	53.9	42.3		
Range	14.5-195	4.2-116	10.8-115		
Crossouts					
No of subjects	21	12	5	3	-
X crossouts per subject	4.5	3.5	2.5	2	-
Range	1-23	1-8	1-3		
Read Over (No of subjects)	4	3	7	2	+
Mechanics rating (1-15)					
X	3.5	2.6	2.5		
Range	1-5	1-4	1-4		

Table 4

RATIONALES FOR PROCESSING BEHAVIOUR IN COMPOSING/DRAFTING AND REVISING/EDITING STAGES (PERCENTAGES)

	Ach. Gr. 9	Low Gr. 6	Adults	No. of Diff.	Direction re Adults
Pausing					
check something	4	12	10	2	+/-
change	8	12	3	3	-
*recall information	28	32	26		
*generate info	32	41	29		
*formulate sent. structure	20	–	10	3	+/-
other	8	3	22	3	+
Rereading					
check specifics	18	14	31	2	+
check overall flow	64	64	31	2	-
*synchronize/extend	18	7	19	2	+
other	–	15	19	3	+
Crossouts					
mechanics/spelling	55.2**	92.9**	66.7	2	
flow of thoughts	44.8	7.1	33.3	3	+/-
Read over (on other occasions)					
overall flow	64	30	39	2	+/-
check for mistakes	20	60	39	3	+/-
other	16	10	22	3	+

* processing behaviours within the composing/drafting stage
** only the grade 9 and grade 6 students differed

from the grade nine students on 28 of these comparisons and from the grade six students on 22. The grade six students also differed from the grade nine students on 24 comparisons. Thus each group is more different from the others than similar, the adults being a little more like the grade six students than like the grade nine students in their writing behaviors.

Planning. The data in Table 1 indicate that the adult subjects were distinctive from the two groups of students in that they wrote more often on a primary topic (25)* - an actual experience. They were unlikely to have thought through what they planned to write, and so were unaware of the ending before writing (4). While they were writing, once they decided how their text would end, they then usually concluded with the next sentence (9). They were more inclined to write in personal narrative genre (18), did not have any specific audience in mind as they wrote, and were generally unaware of the notion and implications of audience (11).

Composing/Drafting. The adults produced fewer words than the two student groups ($\bar{X}$=55.6) and took longer to draft them (approximately eleven words per minute). Much of this time could be accounted for by the fact that they paused much more often than the students as they wrote (see Table 2)

*The number in parentheses represents the number of subjects reporting (25) or the mean score ($\bar{X}$=55.6).

Monitoring/Editing. Data are reported in Tables 3 and 4. The adult subjects, in fact, paused on an average after every 16 words which they transcribed; this compares to pausing after every 26 words by the grade six students, and after every 34 words by the grade nines.

Recalling specific information or generating additional information were common reasons for pausing across groups. The adults, however, differed from one or the other group in pausing more often to check something that they had written, and for other reasons such as deciding whether one sentence should precede or follow another, how many lines they should write, whether they should skip lines to make their work look neater, or "to just get things straight in my head".

Where they reread or reviewed their work, it was mainly to check on something specific, such as the spelling of a word, or to generate additional information so that it synchronized with or followed from what was already written. They were less inclined to review their work in terms of its overall flow or rhythm.

A very small number of the adults crossed-out something that they had written (5), and these subjects made fewer cross-outs ($\bar{X}$ = 2.5) than the grade nine students. While these cross-outs were mainly made to correct spelling/mechanics, they were more likely than the grade six students but less likely than the grade nines to cross-out information in order to redirect their thoughts.

While a small number of adults (7) read their work over before indicating they had finished, this number was greater than for either of the student groups. They, however, were aware of the importance of reading over what they had written and indicated that they would do so in order to check for mistakes, to get a feel for how the information flowed. Those who didn't read over indicated conditions when they would, such as if they had written a longer text, or if they were going to mail it.

Group Similarities

All groups were more alike in their writing behaviors in that they were more inclined to "just end" their text without prior thinking about it. All groups paused most frequently in order to remember specific information or to think up additional information. They were also similar in the degree to which they reviewed or reread as they wrote. The adults were not considered to differ from the student groups in the number of crossouts to change spelling/ mechanics, although the two student groups differed on this characteristic with the grade six students being more inclined to do so. While the mechanics rating of the achieving grade nine students was one scale point higher than the adults and the grade six students, this was not considered an important difference.

In addition, the adults and grade nine students did not differ on their tendency to pause in order to think up additional information so that it followed from what had

been written. They were like the grade six students in that they were more inclined to write in personal narrative genre. They were less inclined to think about how they would end their text early in their writing, and were less aware of the notions and implications of audience. They were also similar to the grade six students in their rate of composing. Like the grade six students they did not differ in how often they paused to check something specific, nor in the number of crossouts made while writing.

Discussion and Implications

The adult subjects differed from the students more often than not on the writing behaviors investigated. They were more likely to differ from the grade nine students (80 percent of the variables) than from the grade six students (60 percent of the variables). These differences tended to be by degree rather than by kind. In only three instances did the adults indicate absence of a behavior (selecting extended topics, writing in narrative, having an audience in mind), and only in one instance did the grade six students indicate an absence of behavior (pausing to formulate an appropriate sentence structure). It must also be remembered that the greatest number does not necessarily reflect the most effective behavior. While better writers are more inclined to form an overall plan for writing (Birnbaum, 1982) and thereby would have some awareness of the ending as was characteristic of the grade nine students, less mature writers are likely to revise for mechanics (Crowhurst, 1986)

as was characteristic of the grade six students of this study.

The writing behaviors of the grade nine students may be considered a prototype. When given a choice for writing, these students were more inclined to select an extended topic and conceive an overall plan for writing. More of them were inclined to decide on a specific ending early in the text. They wrote more and composed faster; they paused and reviewed as they wrote but not as frequently as the other groups. They paused in order to change something, to remember specific information, or to formulate an appropriate sentence structure for encoding their thoughts. They reviewed in order to check the overall flow or rhythm of what they had written. They were more inclined to cross out material as they wrote, and on the average crossed out more material, particularly as they redirected their thinking. While very few of them read over their work at the end, they indicated that had they done so, it would be mainly to get a sense of what they had written.

Research has shown that these behaviors are indicative of more mature writers. Birnbaum (1982) showed that better writers are more inclined to start with an overall plan, and according to Bank's (1984-85) research, they are more likely to compose faster and to generate new information or elaborate as they write. They are likely to pause less often than less mature writers since they tend to pause at the end of major idea units (Birnbaum, 1982). While such writers are

also more likely to engage in revising and editing (Bank, 1984-85); Hull, 1987), they are less inclined to revise for mechanics (Crowhurst, 1986) but are more likely to focus on the overall flow or sense of the text (Birnbaum, 1982).

One implication of this study would be to assist developing writers in emulating the profile exhibited by the achieving grade nine students. A second implication follows from the writings of Graves (1982). He likens writing to a problem solving process within which writers must make many decisions. He maintains that progress is made when writers become aware of the process. Through modelling and discussion, writers should be made aware of the decisions they make as they write. Students may also analyze effective and ineffective examples of writing in terms of how underlying decisions were made. Hull (1987) found that writers tended to be more critical of others' writing than of their own.

Bank (1984-85) maintains that the change-over in viewing writing as "writing" as opposed to "visible speech" comes when writers see the need to revise their work. Awareness of the notion and implications of audience is crucial in this change in thinking. Dahl (1988) and Yukelich and Leverson (1987) believe that revising/editing can be taught and suggest conferencing, whether with peers or the teacher as the most appropriate avenue.

In conclusion, this study has shown that while the writing of adults is comparable to that of low-achieving

grade six students in terms of a holistic evaluation, their writing behaviors tend to differ in many respects. An advantage of this study is that it provides data on a large number of subjects and on an overall conceptualization of the writing process. The writing behaviors of the achieving grade nine students (supported by the literature) may be considered as benchmarks in assisting less mature writers to understand writing as a problem solving or decision making process.

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Synthesis (Chapters 2, 3, 4): Literacy as Skill/Process Development

One important component of a model of adult literacy must be largely cognitive in nature. This component entails skill and process development in reading and writing. Adults must develop control over written language; such control involves developing competency in word structure (phonics and spelling), grammatical usage and interpretation, word or vocabulary selection and understanding, interrelating meaning across larger units of text, critically examining text data and assumptions, etc.. Interactive with these written language competencies is procedural or process knowledge.

Procedural or process knowledge determines the proficiency with which language skills are used in reading and writing. Chapter 3 focussed on various processes of reading while processes of writing are described in Chapter 4. The fact that low achieving school age readers and low-literate adults were not proficient in engaging in reading and writing processes evokes the question "Why?" and needs to be addressed. This facet of understanding literacy, however, may be best investigated within a conceptualization of literacy development as opposed to a conceptualization of the nature of literacy which is the focus of this study. Certainly text genre appears to be a significant factor (Chapter 3).

While literacy must include skill and process knowledge, such competency cannot be isolated from the contexts of use. This point is aptly made by Gavelek (1984) (Chapter 2):

> It is not literacy per se, but the practice of literacy in certain contexts and in certain ways that may enhance an individual's cognitive development. In other words, it is not enough that an individual is able to read and write; one must determine both how and for what purpose these activities are put to use (p. 4).

A significant point in Chapter 2, however, is that competency in written language skill and process does not automatically transfer to language tasks in other contexts. One area of literacy expertise does not imply the other. If adults are to become competent in their control, use, and manipulation of language as a language-focussed activity (evaluating the logic of an argument, delineating the thesis or purpose of a text, or even ensuring that words are spelled correctly) they must be adept in school or academic type language tasks.

Problems may occur, however, if the various and discrete skills and processes of language are not integrated as a unity by the learner. The subjects discussed in Chapter 2 were willing to provide non-word or nonsense responses for words they were asked to read. Obviously they were focussing on a narrow range of skills (mainly sound-symbol association or phonics). While this behavior may have been influenced by their prior teaching/learning experiences, it no doubt is reflected by them as adults, as their concept of what a

suitable reading of text may entail. Concepts of reading and writing are discussed in the next chapter.

Significant Concepts

cognition	reading	writing	skill
process	procedure	proficiency	contexts
transfer	school	academic	

CHAPTER 5

CONCEPTS OF READING AND WRITING AMONG LOW-LITERATE ADULTS*

One of the tasks that society generally expects of schools is that they help children develop the ability to read and write. Figures show that vast numbers of individuals do not develop such ability while in school (Hunter and Harman,1979, for U.S. data; Literacy in Canada, 1987, for Canadian data). Riby-Williams (1975) suggested that while the goals of the school may be very clear (to the educators), the learners may misinterpret what education is all about. This is particularly so with respect to literacy. Johnson (1985) refers to these misinterpretations as misconceptions or missing conceptions. The purpose of this study was to determine the nature of the concepts possessed by two groups of low-literate adults regarding reading and writing and the nature of the reading/writing process.

Adults' Perceptions of Reading and Writing

Research has shown that low-literate adults have a very restricted view of the nature of reading and writing (Amoroso,1984; Eno, 1985; Gambrell and Heathington,1981; Johnson, 1985; Lytle, Marmor, and Penner, 1986). In these

*A version of this paper has been published.
Fagan, W.T. (1988). Concepts of reading and writing among low-literate adults. Reading Research and Instruction, 27, 47-60.

studies, adults generally thought of reading as a decoding or sound-symbol associating process or as Amoroso describes it, reading was viewed as "how to catch the sounds, breaking down words, looking words up or writing words down until they are learned" (p. 13). Gambrell and Heathington, for example, found that only 21 percent of poor adult readers versus 79 percent of good readers considered reading to be meaning centered. Fagan (1987) showed that low-literate adults were more like low-achieving grade 2 readers than achieving readers in grade 2 or readers in grade 4, in terms of their processing characteristics. With regard to writing, low-literate adults are inclined to think of writing as a technical activity in which spelling and punctuation are dominant (Lytle, Marmor, and Penner, 1986).

Johnson (1985) showed that such misconceptions or missing conceptions may have detrimental effects on an individual's literacy development. In the Lytle, Marmor, and Penner study, the low-literate adults were inclined to suggest that improvement in reading and writing depended on being able to decode or spell or on practice, which in actual fact, entailed the same skills. Thus as Heath (1985) suggests, the concern is more with literacy skills than with literacy behaviors. The present study represented an attempt to provide more information on the metacognitive knowledge of two groups of low-literate adults - prisoners and those living in mainstream society.

Method

Procedure

The data on concepts of reading and writing were obtained through a structured photo association task and through interviews.

The Photo Association Task consisted of 12 photographs of individuals engaged in reading and writing, including individuals watching a news channel on TV, and engaging in other activities (drawing, looking at pictures, playing cards). The photos were selected so that they would exemplify a range of characteristics: age variation, input variation, variety of print materials. There were equal numbers of males and females pictured who were balanced across three age ranges: preschool/grade one, intermediate, and adult. The subjects were asked to select (a) those who were reading, (b) those who were writing, (c) the best reader, (d) the best writer. They were also asked what the best reader and writer would do while they were reading or writing. Content validity way claimed for the photo task since the photos were selected on the basis of having asked five achieving high school students and five adults (who had completed high school) to list as many characteristics as possible of good readers and writers. The non-reading/ writing tasks were chosen based on their responses to the question, "What tasks can you think of that relate to

reading and writing but do not include any reading or writing per se?"

During the interview, which covered many other topics in addition to concepts of reading and writing, the subjects were asked what they could remember about how they learned to read and write, the role of the teacher, and how they could improve their present reading/writing performance. While the data from the interview may be questioned in terms of the accuracy of recall, more important significance may be attached to the subjects' present perceptions of what happened at that time in the past since it may be assumed that their present perceptions influence their present approach to reading and writing. The aim was to understand a situation as the subjects perceived it. This method is referred to as "interpretative inquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). According to Owens (1982), human behavior is best understood through the thoughts, feelings, values, perceptions, and actions of the individuals concerned. The subjects were also free to say they could not remember and a number of them choose to do this.

The responses to both the interview and the photo association task were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. An unordered matrix was constructed for the responses and then analyzed to detect patterns within groups and likenesses and differences across groups.

Results

Conditions for Reading/Writing

The pertinent data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Conditions for Reading and Writing

	Prisoners	Mainstream Society Adults
Reading		
Print (paper input)	23*	22
TV (print)	23	16
Drawings/marks	4	11
Playing cards	4	6
Writer as reader	8	6
Writer		
Pen/pencil to paper	23	24
Pen/pencil but not connecting with paper	6	6
Marks/drawings	20	21
Pre-school child making marks/drawings	20	21

*The totals on this Table and subsequent Tables are often greater than 26 since some subjects usually gave more than one response.

Over eighty-five percent of the subjects believed that there must be print input for reading to occur. However, the mainstream society adults were more inclined to believe that

this print must be in a "paper format"; only 16 of the 26 mainstream society adults, compared to 23 of the 26 prisoners thought that print via TV constituted reading. The significance of "paper" for the mainstream society adults was also suggested by the number (11) who thought that drawings (lines) also constituted input for reading. Less than one-quarter of both groups thought that playing cards constituted sufficient input for reading to occur. As one adult said, "I guess if reading is making sense, then you have to make sense out of what is on the cards before you can play". Almost three-quarters of both groups did not consider a writer as being a reader, even in response to a photograph showing a person pausing while in the process of writing.

Both groups almost totally agreed that writing was taking place when a person was making contact with paper through the use of a pencil or pen. Over three-quarters of both groups also considered making marks or drawings as constituting writing. Very few from both groups (less than one-quarter) considered writing as taking place when a person was seen with paper and pen but not connecting both. That is, they did not see preplanning as part of the writing act. Age was not a factor in determining who was a writer. Over three-quarters of both groups believed that a small child (age 2) was actually writing. This, of course, is

consistent with their acceptance of marks or drawings as being writing.

Characteristics Associated with Selecting the Best Reader/Writer

The results from the photo task on the choice of best reader and writer are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Characteristics Associated with Best Reader and Writer

Reader	**Prisoner**	**Mainstream**
Big text	17	16
Older individual	3	2
Studying/concentrating	2	3
Habitual reader (seeking knowledge)	5	4
Other (younger/glasses)	4	1
Writer		
Handwriting	11	10
Older individual	5	7
Form of text (eg. essay)	6	2
Amount written	1	3
Involved /concentrating	1	3
Looks competent	2	-
Younger individual	4	-

Both groups felt that the size of the text was the most important indicator of effective reading. Their associations

with a big book included "lots of information," "lots of hard words," "small print," "part of a university course". Some suggested the book might be an encyclopedia and that the reader was getting information to use for some purpose. Others noted that she was at least one-half way through the book which indicated interest and determination. Other characteristics which they assigned to the best reader included being an habitual reader. (This characteristic was in response to a photo of an individual reading a newspaper which they associated with being an everyday reader). One adult also indicated that by reading the newspaper, a person would know what was going on in the world and good readers should be knowledgeable. Being older, studying or concentrating, wearing glasses, or being young were given as characteristics less frequently. Four prisoners thought that a good reader was younger; however, they were comparing this reader to them rather than to the individuals in the other photographs. They felt that being younger than they implied more opportunities to study and to know more. (The person pictured was 21).

The most common characteristic ascribed to a good writer was the neatness of the handwriting. This characteristic was given about equally by both groups. Some subjects commented on the handwriting being so "level and straight", and the "letters nicely made". Several thought that being older (than the other people pictured) would

suggest being a good writer, while the same four prisoners who thought that being younger was an advantage to being a good reader, thought similarly in relation to writing. Six of the prisoners thought that the form of the text (that is, its resemblance to an essay or a story) was important since a good writer would be more inclined to write this kind of text than just writing sentences. Other less frequent responses included the amount of text that had been written, the appearance of the person that suggested concentrating, or looking competent. One adult said, "This one she's really down to business. The way she leaning over and thinking, you can see she's interested. She's definitely involved." Several of the subjects compared one photo with another and on the basis of the above characteristics, choose the best writer by the process of elimination.

The gender of the individual did not seem to be a pertinent characteristic of the best reader or writer since none of the subjects made reference to whether the person pictured was male or female in responding to why they had chosen various photos.

Nature of Involvement of Good Reader/Writers

The subjects were asked to try and describe what the best reader and writer they had selected might do as they read/wrote. The data are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Nature of Involvement of Good Readers and Writers

Readers	Prisoners	Mainstream
Form		
Practice	19	4
Sounds/letters focus	5	13
Word meaning (vocabulary)	6	7
Function		
Comprehension	2	3
Enjoyment/interest	2	1
Concentration	1	-
Writers		
Form/Mechanics		
Practice	18	2
Handwriting	3	8
Spelling/Punctuation	8	11
Sentence structure (grammar)	2	3
Content		
Vocabulary	1	2
Makes sense	-	3
Images/ideas	1	3
The Writer		
Reads a lot	2	-

The prisoners more than the mainstream society adults were more inclined to believe that a good reader practices or reads a lot. On the other hand, the mainstream society adults believed that the good reader engages in sounding out words. However, both sets of responses were not that different, for when the prisoners were probed as to what would happen when a good reader read/practiced, at least one-half of the number responding said that they would be trying to sound out or "know" the words. The first four conditions in Table 3 relate to the form of the text. Over

85 percent of both groups indicated that good readers would be more knowledgeable of such text features. About one-quarter of each group indicated that the good reader focussed on word meaning or vocabulary. One subject seemed aware of using different cueing systems when reading. He said, "If you read lots and know the vowels (which he associated with using letter cues), then you can read ahead to get the gist of the story and fill in the first if necessary". Comprehending and enjoyment were low on the priorities of the adults in terms of key characteristics of good readers.

Consistent with their views on good readers, 18 of the prisoners also maintained that a good writer practices. However, when pressed as to what this meant, they tended to define practice in terms of letter formation and handwriting. In addition, eight of the mainstream society adults and three of the prisoners specified handwriting as a key characteristic of a good writer. About one-half of each group believed that a good writer must be a good speller. The first four characteristics of Table 3 deal with the technical or mechanical aspects of writing and when totalled, the figures for each of the adult groups indicate that 88 percent responses of the prisoners and 75 percent of the responses of the mainstream society adults focus on this aspect of writing. The number of responses of the prisoners regarding the thinking/construction/organization

of information was practically nil; however, eight of the responses of the mainstream society adults did consider the "composition" of writing as opposed to the mechanical aspects or the "scribing."

Memories of Been Taught Reading and Writing

Of those who believed that they could remember how they were taught to read, 70 percent of the prisoners versus 50 percent of the mainstream society adults felt it was through sounding out the words or learning the ABC's (see Table 4). Another smaller number (15 percent in each group) said that they learned how to read through the "look-and-say" method. Two specifically mentioned "Dick and Jane". Another forgot the Dick and Jane series but certainly remembered the format. This adult said, "I learned from the book that went 'See Jack jump! Run Mutt run! I would look at it and try to pronounce it and if I couldn't, the teacher would tell me. Then I would read it all again." Most discussed having participated in "round robin reading". They felt that the focus in this kind of exercise was on sounding out words. Some, however, indicated that when they were "stuck" on a word, the teacher just told them.

About one-half of the subjects remembered help at home. These memories ranged from extremely positive to extremely negative. One of the prisoners (a Native Person) remembered his mother and grandmother reading books with him and talking about what they meant. He remembered being excited

about these occasions and looking forward to them. A mainstream society adult who came from a large family remembered all the children crowding around their mother while she read to them and how they jostled for the place closest to their mother, while an other mainstream society adult remembered his mother reading to the whole family every evening after supper - adults and children alike. Another adult, however, remembered his father "making" him read and whenever he missed a word he got a "hard slap" for it.

Table 4

Memories of Being Taught to Read and Write

Reading	**Prisoners**	**Mainstream**
Sounds/letters/ABC	18	13
Look Say	4	4
Read to someone (practice)	2	-
Can't remember	2	9
Writing		
Copied/traced letters	18	21
Learned grammar/sentence structure	4	3
Can't remember	4	2

The adults' memories for being taught to write tended to parallel their memories for the method for being taught to read in the sense that they remembered the focus being on letter formation. One subject described it in this way, "She would go to the board and make a letter, telling us to watch how she was making it. And we had lined sheets and we had to copy it so that the big letters just hit the top line and the small letters hit the middle line". When asked what

happened after that, he said, "Then we would write words where we joined the letters together, like 'cat'. And then the words got joined into sentences. So I guess that's the way I learned it."

Reading and Writing Responsibility

When asked if a teacher was necessary to learn to read and write, 16 of the prisoners and 18 of the mainstream adults said yes. One adult said, "If she can't do it, I don't know what she's doing teaching. She shouldn't be in the classroom." Some pointed to themselves as examples of not being able to learn on their own. Their belief about the role of the teacher also reflected their present thinking, for several qualified their responses by saying that in their case, they would need a tutor now. One adult distinguished a teacher from a tutor and felt only the former had the necessary expertise to help her read and write. She said, "I often feel a little embarrassed at times (in her present program). I feel a little behind the others. They are all working on answering questions and talking about what they are reading while I am still studying how words are put together. However I know this is what I need. My husband was thinking about getting a (university) student as a tutor for me, but I knew I had to have a professional if I was to improve my reading and writing. If I had completed highschool and needed upgrading, a student (tutor) would be OK." A few who said "no", qualified that statement

by saying that "a teacher was necessary to start you off but after that you could manage on your own." A couple thought that the parents could cooperate with the teacher in helping a child to read and write. However, the notion of the parents' role was as an assistant to the teacher. As one subject described it, "Parents could assist the teacher under her direction. They could get flash cards from the teacher to practice with their children." Three who gave an unqualified "no" cited examples of people whom they knew who learned to read without going to school and one adult said that if he could do it over again he would "decide to learn rather than waiting for the teacher to push".

The belief that a teacher is necessary for literacy to occur was often based on a teacher's comments. One subject, for a subsequent interview, brought her report cards from her last year of school (junior high). One report card was given in January and the teacher's comments read, "Susan's reading skill development level is quite low. However, she always makes a serious effort in class. She is scheduled to begin working in two specific reading kits this week. One is based on the Archie comic book series and the other is called the SRA Pilot Lab. Both kits emphasize "comprehension" skill building. I have no doubt that if Susan completes these programs that she will have improved her reading ability considerably by the end of the year." The same teacher's comments on the end-of-the-year report card

were as follows: "Susan will always be a weak reader. However, she always makes a sincere effort in class to work at her reading skill development. I would suggest strongly that Susan take reading again from me if possible. If it is not possible to place Susan in my reading class next year, then I would recommend that she be enrolled in my Learning Assistance class with me instead, if there is to be any hope for improvement". The comments were a clear message to Susan that she could not become a good reader independent of the teacher.

Improving Reading and Writing

The perception of the adults about how they were taught to read and write seemed to influence their perceptions of how they could improve their reading and writing at present. (see Table 5). Eighteen of the prisoners said they would need to learn how to sound out words better,or they would need to practice, which meant trying to figure out hard words. One adult said, "You must recognize and sound the letters and sound the words out. I learned phonics to help me sound out words and group letters like 'tion', 'ing'. Once you get it in your head it helps quite a bit." Ten of the mainstream society adults said that they did not how they could improve which is consistent with their belief that a teacher/tutor is necessary and the teacher/tutor would know what was best. Another eight of the mainstream society adults believed that more familiarity with words/

word parts was what they needed. Some added that in order to improve it would be necessary to go to school, which is consistent with the significance of the role of the teacher in learning how to read. Thinking about how to improve had not occurred to a number of the subjects. One adult said, "That's a hard question. I never thought about how my reading would get better. Come to think of it, I don't think there are that many really good readers."

Table 5

Improving Reading and Writing

Reading	**Prisoners**	**Mainstream**
Form		
Sounds/letters	8	4
Practice	10	4
Sentence structure/punctuation	-	3
Content		
Comprehension	1	2
Interest/motivation	2	3
Don't know	5	10
Writing		
Form/Mechanics		
Handwriting	10	4
Practice	9	9
Grammar/spelling	3	3
Meaningful	-	3
Interest/motivation	2	1
Don't know	2	6

Seventy-three percent of the responses of the prisoners and one-half of the responses of the mainstream society adults indicated that in order for them to improve their

writing, it would be necessary for them to work on their handwriting or to practice which basically involved handwriting skills plus improving their spelling. One adult (mainstream society) said it would be necessary to work on "all the big and small letters, apostrophes, dots, and all that", while another said it would be necessary to "learn how to use your wrist to practice on any words you knew and to be neat." Ten percent of the mainstream society adults were aware of the significance of meaning for becoming a good writer. One said that it was important to "know what you wanted to write about and to understand what you were putting down", while another said, "when there are many messages going through your head, it is important to put some on hold while you get your priorities straight as to the ones you need for your purposes." Two subjects were influenced by their writing experiences in their present literacy programs and one commented as follows; "You should know your topic. Then you should write a sentence to begin the story. The story, of course, must have a turning point and a resolution. It's important to have a plan for writing. I'm trying to teach my daughter this." The second said, "You must connect what is in your mind with the paper. Spelling was always a hang-up with me, but now I am concentrating more on putting things together and organizing ideas into paragraphs."

Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with those of Amoroso,1984; Gambrell and Heathington, 1981; Johnson, 1985; Lytle, Marmor, and Penner, 1986, that low literate adults have a very restricted view of reading and writing. Differences between both groups of adults in this study were mostly due to their use of semantics (decoding versus practice). As Amoroso states, this knowledge which they possess of reading and writing is counterproductive to their goals for becoming better readers and writers.

Gorman (1981) suggested that the perceptions of these adults about reading/writing and learning to read and write may not be inaccurate since they are often exposed to a "deficit view" of reading. That is, the goal is to provide the learners with knowledge usually by working through books in a very structured manner. The focus is on WHAT is to be done based on criteria specified by the teacher rather than on the teacher providing a situation whereby the learner has to decide HOW to engage in a reading/writing task for which PURPOSE under what CONDITIONS and for what RELEVANCE to his/her life. The focus on WHAT influences learners to become dependent on the teacher's directions; the skill, rather than the nature of its execution and use, becomes the reality (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). The "stages" (predominant use of graphic, versus semantic, versus integrated knowledge) which Norman and Malicky (1987) identified in

terms of adult illiterates' performance would seem to be a reflection of the influence of their prior experiences with, and resulting concepts of reading. Heath (1985) cautions of the necessity of defining what it means to be literate so that school or adult literacy program graduates will exemplify literacy behaviors rather than a number of literacy skills. Amoroso states that "one of the challenges is to help learners incorporate a new perception of literacy into their existing value systems" (p. 16), which Taylor, Wade, Jackson, Blum and Goold (1980) suggest involves broadening the learners' "awareness of the role of written language in life and society" (p. 75).

By promoting restricted notions about reading and writing and about readers and writers, teachers and tutors engender a feeling of dependency within learners. The concept of reading as decoding and writing as script is counterproductive in the sense that learners become dependent on their beliefs and are not willing to discard them. O'Brien (1987) documented the case of one adult who struggled for over two years with the "narrowness" of his concepts and his resistancy to change. This dependency of learners on what the teacher says and does regarding reading and writing is emphasized by Riby-Williams (1975): "They become wholly dependent on teachers for information and see no reason for the acquisition of knowledge if they haven't 'taken the course' in school. But teachers are not going to

be watching students once their formal education is at an end and it is counterproductive to have an educational structure in which the only responsibility a child has is to satisfy the particular needs of a particular teacher at a given time" (p. 81). Eno (1985) suggests that this dependency is further enhanced through the manner of testing reading and writing which tends to focus on specifics rather than on the broader aspects of literacy and its use.

Implications

Since teachers and tutors affect how learners perceive reading and writing, they need to examine their notions of what it means to be literate. Reading and writing should be seen as meaning constructing activities which may be used for various purposes. It is not enough for teachers/tutors to believe this; they must also operationalize their beliefs. The reading and writing curriculum needs to be broadened beyond a specific text or series or workbook to include reading and writing activities that learners encounter beyond the "academic" context and the approach to developing competency in reading and writing must be through providing strategies within meaningful contexts rather than focussing on the mechanics of the task in isolation from the conditions of use. Thus, rather than "telling", teachers and tutors should aim for improving the learners' sensibility and responsiveness to various literacy situations so that they can eventually take control and

operate on such tasks independently of teacher/tutor control. Any testing or evaluation should exemplify this kind of teaching. It is unfortunate that low achieving readers and writers get tested most often and when tests focus on text or mechanics they reinforce the low achievers' existing concepts of what reading and writing entail and what is necessary for improvement.

Teachers and tutors must be aware of the concepts of reading and writing held by the learners in their programs. As O'Brien (1987) showed, such concepts are not easily discarded and the teacher/tutor may need to work "through" rather than "around" these concepts. That is, rather than dismissing the learners' concepts outright and adopting an approach that may be in conflict with the learners' perceptions, the program may need to initially entertain these concepts and then seek to broaden and expand them so that the focus is on literacy behaviors rather than literacy skills.

Finally teachers need to monitor carefully the "hidden curriculum", the evaluation and feedback they provide, including report cards. Learners should be viewed as active not passive. Literacy is not given to a person; it develops, usually in cooperation with another. When adults return to classes they should not be exposed to conditions under which they have already failed. Mace explains it this way: "As tutors we have no right merely to offer a second chance, a

repeat performance of the teacher-pupil model that has already failed. We must be co-learners, participants in an act of constructive anger. It is a hard school of learning it means that we have to shed the ideas of superior versus inferior pupil, of the top stream teaching the bottom stream, of knowing teacher versus ignorant student" (p. 19).

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CHAPTER 6

PRISONERS' AND MAINSTREAM SOCIETY ADULTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CONDITIONS AFFECTING THEIR LEARNING*

Locus of control is usually understood in terms of whether an individual attributes (perceives) internal or external factors as being responsible for present conditions. Individuals who possess a greater degree of internal locus of control tend to be (1) more persistent in doing what they believe to be important in spite of discomfort (Midlarski, 1971), (2) more likely to seek out information and to want to understand their situation better and the implications of the decisions of others (Seeman, 1962), (3) more likely to be achievers (Johnson, 1985; Lessing, 1969), (4) more responsive to information and (5) more likely to generalize information to a number of circumstances thereby increasing the utility of their learning (Phares, 1976; O'Grady, 1987). Internal control is also more likely to be a characteristic of older versus younger individuals (Penk, 1969).

On the other hand, individuals who lack internal control, attribute failure to uncontrollable factors (Diener and Dweck, 1978, 1980). Lefcourt (1982) maintains that the perceived inability of a person to effect one's fate in a

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meaningful way is often a response to a set of depriving and denigrating conditions. He further contends that such perceptions are a source of immature and poor coping behavior - a feeling of helplessness. Such helplessness is manifested in cognitive confusion, little motivation, and negative affect (Johnson and Winograd, 1983). Jones (1981) maintains that lack of confidence in ability to succeed is the most significant aspect of the self-concept of low-literate adults. An additional self concept liability according to Jones is the adult's susceptibility to field dependence or external factors. Johnson and Winograd believe that such attributions arise from situations in which the learner finds little success and experiences differential treatment under similar circumstances.

The present study was designed to investigate the significance of internal and external factors in the lives of two groups of adults and to try and understand their perceptions of past and present conditions as such conditions affected their literacy lives.

Method

Procedure

The Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire (IAR) (Crandal, Katkovsky, & Crandal, 1965) and the Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External control scale (ANS-IE) (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973) were used to collect the data on locus of control. The IAR, a 34 item questionnaire, is intended for children but was chosen because the goal was to

try and understand the childhood perceptions of the adults. In introducing the questionnaire, the researcher asked the individuals to think about things that may have happened when they were in school. The Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External control scale, a 40 item questionnaire, refers to ordinary life situations rather than to academic experiences

Crandall et al (1965) established test-retest reliability for the IAR on 923 elementary and high school children. The reliability coefficient between results after a two month interval was .69 which the authors considered to be "moderately high." Reliability for the ANS-IE was established through split-half and test-retest. The coefficients for the former method ranged from .74 to .86, while for the latter, with a six week interval, the reliability coefficient was .83. Further data on reliability comes from an experiment by the author with fifteen adults who were not part of the study and who were administered both questionnaires with a year's interval. The reliability coefficient for the IAR was .87 and for the Nowicki-Strikland, .76. The higher reliability for the IAR may be due to the fact that the subjects were responding in regard to a definite set of past referents (school experiences) and which did not change under present conditions, while some of the items of the Nowicki-Strickland referred to present day circumstances, the perceptions of which could be expected to change over the course of a year. Nevertheless, the reliability of both questionnaires is considered high. Validity

for the ANS-IE was based on data which indicated that scores were not related to social desirability or intelligence test scores and through significant positive correlations between this scale and other established scales such as the Rotter (Nowicki and Duke, 1974).

Since an individual's locus of control is influenced by a particular set of referents which most likely will be different over time (Lefcourt, 1982) and since the construct is often interpreted in terms of global factors (luck, ability,etc.) the subjects were also interviewed with respect to circumstances in their earlier and present lives. As they talked about their school experiences, they were asked to think of (a) someone who had problems in learning and (b) someone who was successful in school and which factors may have caused these problems or success. Their talking about their own school experiences also provided information on how they perceived these experiences in terms of the degree of control or the extent to which such experiences provided for flexibility and opportunities for decision making on the part of the learners. Information was also obtained regarding sources they presently availed of when they required help with reading or writing and changes they would suggest for schools in light of the experiences they had had.

Data Analysis

The IAR provides three scores: the degree of internal control for successful experiences, unsuccessful experi-

ences, and a total internal locus of control score. A single score reflecting external locus of control is obtained from the ANS-IE. The scores on these questionnaires were submitted to t-tests in order to determine if differences occurred between the two groups.

All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed according to the areas probed. Unordered meta-matrices were first constructed for all questions that were common across subjects. The data were searched for patterns within subject groups and comparison/contrasts across groups. When feasible, data were quantified and expressed in tabular form. Quotes from the subjects were used to emphasize points in the description of these data.

Results

Locus of Control

The data from the questionnaires are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Means for Locus of Control and t-test Differences

	Mainstream society Adults (26)	Prisoners (26)
IAR - Internal (Successful)	12.6	10.6*
Internal (Unsuccessful)	11.7	11.5
Total	24.3	22.1*
Nowicki-Strickland		
External-total	15.2	16.3

$p. < .05$
* significantly different

While both groups of adults were similar in terms of the perceptions of their degree of control within unsuccessful academic situations, their perceptions differed for successful situations. This difference was significant at the .05 level ($T = 2.42$, $df = 50$). The prisoners were less inclined to attribute success to their intervention than were the mainstream society adults. The overall totals consequently differed ($T=2.10$, $p.<.05$). The overall total of internal control for the prisoners was less than that recorded for grade 3 children in the norming sample while that for the mainstream society adults corresponded to that for students at about a grade 4 to 5 grade level. Prisoners as a group did not tend to have a strong sense of internal control over their academic circumstances.

The data from the ANS-IE indicate that both groups were also more inclined to have a stronger sense of external control over events that are not tied to school, with the prisoners having a slightly higher external control score than the mainstream society adults. This is understandable in the sense that as the prisoners talked about events in their lives that dealt with their crimes and the fact that they were now serving time for these, and were subject to many restrictions, they realized the greater power of external factors. The difference, however, was not statistically significant. The level of external control for non-academic events was comparable to that for grade 5 or 6 students according to the ANS-IE norms. The norms represent

a sliding scale with grade 3 students most external and grade 12 students, the least.

Learner Success and Failure

In order to obtain some indication of how the subjects compared themselves to others in terms of factors affecting their learning, they were asked why they thought some (particular) students were successful in school and others were not. The responses of the adults could be grouped into three categories: external factors, self characteristics, and self decisions. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Factors Perceived Important in Explaining Learner Success and Failure

	Mainstream society adults(26)		Prisoners(26)	
	Success	Problems	Success	Problems
For Other Students				
External factors	9	11	7	7
Self-charac.	7	6	12	7
Self-decision	5	4	6	5
Don't know	7*	7	3	5
For Themselves				
External		15		14
Self-characteristics		6		5
Self-decision		5		7

*The numbers indicate the number of subjects responding. Totals may be greater than 26 for this and subsequent tables since some subjects gave more than one response.

The mainstream society adults were more inclined to attribute both success and failure to external factors than were the prisoners. Typical comments of the role of external factors in the success of a learner were: "financially well-off; his parents were prominent in the community and it was important that he did well in school; got help at home and was made to do his homework; her mother was a teacher; he had educated parents; went to school every day because he was scared of his dad; he was from a classy family - a straight john family so he obeyed the rules, dressed neat and impressed the right people." Comments within the external factor explaining problems included: "He was an immigrant; his parents didn't speak English; there were home problems; the teacher didn't teach properly; the way he was brought up - there wasn't enough discipline; the parents were not involved with the school system; the kids he hung around with had a bad influence on him; started school older than the others; other students made fun of the way he looked."

The prisoners were more inclined to believe that self-characteristics contributed to success for others. Self-characteristics though internal by nature are similar to external factors in the sense that they were perceived as not being subject to change. Examples of such characteristics that they perceived as contributing to success were: "She was a loner and so had nothing to do but study; had a good head on his shoulders to figure out things; real smart;

a genius; grasped things very quickly; brains." Those that were associated with failure included: "He was a slow learner; she was going deaf and blind; he had too many physical handicaps; he couldn't really catch on."

Self-decisions that contributed to success included: "tried hard; had his goals all mapped out; was interested and paid attention; took time to study; wanted to get somewhere", while self-decisions leading to learning problems or failure included "not interested; didn't apply himself; fooled around; wanted to goof off rather than study." Both groups of subjects were approximately equal in their beliefs about the role of personal decision in success or failure. One of the mainstream society adults was aware of how a combination of factors could contribute to a lack of academic success. He told of a family he knew where "the children were slow, the teacher wasn't encouraging and the family didn't help." He said that the effect of this combination of factors was similar to their being mentally retarded.

A number of subjects (over one-quarter of the mainstream society adults) indicated they had no suggestion as to why a particular person did well or poorly in school. In some cases, this seemed to be a case of not wanting to dwell on the personal life of someone else they had known (although they were not asked to give a name - just to think of someone). However, most of them seemed genuine in their

comments that they just didn't know why a person did well or poorly.

When asked which factors were significant in their own school background, of the 19 prisoners and 20 mainstream society adults who responded, 55 percent attributed their difficulties to external factors. The most common explanation within this category was circular in that they attributed their learning problems to not being able to read and write and they couldn't read and write because of unfavorable school circumstances. Explicit external factors mentioned were: "the teacher didn't show me how to do things; the teacher didn't try to understand me; the class was too large and I couldn't get individual attention; I was moved along faster than I could cope; I got sent to a special class; a lot of our time was spent watching videos or playing games; there were too many family problems." The number of self decisions and self characteristics was about evenly split although the prisoners were more inclined to attribute their lack of success to self decisions. One prisoner (age 19 and only two years out of school) commented on a self characteristic as being the determiner of his history of school failure. He said that as a young child he had been sent for "special tests." The person there (he wasn't sure if the person was in medicine or education) told his mother in his presence that he had "dilexia". When the researcher asked him what "dilexia" was, he said that part of his brain was not functioning properly and affected his

eyes so that he couldn't learn right. When asked if he believed this, he said, "Well I'm living proof, ain't I?" - a self fulfilling prophecy.

School as Structure

Many comments were made indicating that school imposed too many restrictions and too little opportunity for taking responsibility. Twenty of the mainstream society adults and 16 of the prisoners looked back on school as a place where the teacher was in absolute control and the learners were given no say in choosing learning tasks or making other decisions relative to them. One adult described school as a place where "the teacher had it all laid out and you towed the line or else." Another commented that "school was a place to get work done and then go home and do more." One subject provided an explanation as to why this was so, "Teachers have a schedule to follow and they have so much information to get across to the kids so they too have little choice in how it works." Six of the prisoners who had been in special classes stated that there was much more leeway in such classes where there were smaller numbers. However, three felt that in such situations there wasn't enough structure or encouragement to take responsibility for learning in the sense that children were often allowed to engage in activities (games) or watch TV which they did not perceive as directly related to reading, or that the teacher did too much for the kids.

Nineteen of the prisoners and 17 of the mainstream society adults said that they perceived the climate of the school as being incongruent with their home situations. They said they were fairly independent in choosing what they did in looking after themselves at home and in taking on such responsibilities as getting meals, or looking after younger siblings, etc.. One mainstream society adult, for example, who talked about seeing his mother being physically abused said he had to raise his two younger sisters.

Suggestions for Change

It may be hypothesized that given an opportunity to change a system that was not perceived as successful, individuals would change factors that they felt were most detrimental to success. The data in response to the question, "If you could have changed anything or anybody in connection with your schooling, what would you change?" are given in Table 3.

Table 3

Suggestions for Changing School/Learning Conditions

	Mainstream society adults (26)	Prisoners (26)
External		
Family	4	5
School personnel	7	7
School organ.	4	6
Teacher/student interaction	4	0
Reading/writing performance	2	2
Internal (Self)	4	7
Not sure	6	9

Both groups of subjects were similar in their suggestions for changing conditions which they perceived as external to them. This trend of thinking is consistent with their perceived significance of external factors in their past learning. Pertinent comments included.

"I would never agree to have been bussed all the way to another school for a special class and away from the kids who were my friends. It was a real shame to have to do that. I would never want a child of mine shipped off to a school outside the area we live in." (Mainstream society adult)

"I would never want them to highlight or single out special class kids. Like at the Christmas concert they announced the learning disability class. It seemed as if we were freaks or something. I felt like hiding." (Mainstream society adult)

"I wish I could have had different parents and make the kids at school more understanding. I wish they just could have changed places with me or a while." (Prisoner)

"I'd like to change my grade 9 teacher to make her more understanding of me. She never tried to understand what I was going through." (Prisoner)

"I would have gone everyday if someone had shown it was important. I'd like to change the way I was brought up." (Mainstream society adult)

"I would change teachers and their way of teaching. They should know the best ways to work with kids who have problems and be able to meet their specific needs. Instead

they leave these kids alone or send another kid to help and they spend time with the kids who really don't need it." (Prisoner)

Several mentioned crowded classrooms where it was difficult for the teacher to give individual attention.

Seven of the prisoners versus 4 of the mainstream society adults indicated that they would bring about changes in themselves. This is consistent with their perceptions of factors which contributed to their failure. Comments re self change included:

"I'd change my behavior. I'd listen and not do crazy things."

"I would get more involved and take it more seriously."

"I would work ten times as hard, not be a nuisance and speak out to my teacher when I felt I was not getting the help I really needed."

Approximately one-quarter of both groups of subjects were not sure of changes they would suggest which perhaps reflected their degree of lack of internal control regarding school-type situations. One person explained it this way: "You really have to understand what's going on before you can change anything. It's too much for me."

Another person who seemed to be exemplifying an extreme case of fatalism said, "I don't know. I don't know what school is all about. I question what it's all for. I think my life is boring. It's hard to manage with a minimal income. I feel so uncertain. Would education - will

education compensate for all the other things I'm missing in life? I feel I'm not really living."

Seeking Help for Present Literacy Tasks

In order to determine how independent the subjects were in using literacy in their present lives, they were asked how they coped with literacy tasks. Eighty percent of the prisoners and 57 percent of the mainstream society adults were more inclined to ask others when they needed help. This is understandable for the prisoners in terms of their constant proximity to other people. The prisoners were more inclined to ask fellow inmates rather than guards; however, they would ask the latter only if they trusted them for they believed that they were "smarter" (had more education) than most of the inmates. From the inmate population, the subjects were inclined to ask "buddies", "friends", "cell mates", or "anyone who knows more that I do." The mainstream society adults, on the other hand, were inclined to ask someone from within their families. While the prisoners were satisfied with the help they received, this was not always the case with the mainstream society adults. One woman said, "I ask my husband but he's never too helpful although he's got grade 12."

One important difference that was noted between the prisoners and mainstream society adults in regard to their literacy problems was that the prisoners were less reticent to talk about them and did not seem aware of the implications of asking help from just anyone on the street or of

going up to a manager/supervisor and asking for a job and indicating that they had problems reading and writing. The mainstream society adults were more inclined to "cover-up" any such problems and several had invented ingenious ways to do this. However, for those now enrolled in a literacy program, they indicated that there came a point when they couldn't hide their problems with literacy any longer. As one person said, "I got sick and tired of lying; I knew I had to face it."

About equal though small numbers (15 percent) of both adult groups consulted a dictionary or other reference book when they needed help with something they were reading or writing. Very few tried to solve the difficulty on their own; in fact five of the mainstream society adults just put the task aside or skipped over the part that was causing difficulty without any effort to try and figure it out. This difference between the mainstream society adults and the prisoners could be due to the fact that the nature of the prisoners' literacy tasks was such that a resolution was usually immediately needed (need to know the contents of a letter just received, understanding information regarding court appearances, filling out a request form for canteen services).

Self Rating of Present Reading and Writing Performance

When asked to rate their present reading and writing performance, the prisoners were more inclined to rate

themselves higher than the mainstream society adults; this was especially so in the case of writing. The ratings are given in Table 4.

Table 4

Personal Ratings of Reading/Writing Performance

	Mainstream society adults (26)	Prisoners (26)
Reading		
Good	5	7
OK	13	9
Poor	8	10
Writing		
Good	-	10
OK	9	8
Poor	17	8

It is important to note that the ratings of both groups were relative to their needs which were very different. The prisoners evaluated their reading and writing in terms of meeting their needs within the prison setting while the mainstream society adults measured theirs against standards for jobs or personal satisfaction and in most cases, since they were enrolled in literacy programs they perceived a gap between their present performance and their goals. This was in contrast to the prisoners whose immediate literacy needs were adequately met and who did not perceive the same need for increased literacy performance in their lives as did the

mainstream society adults. In addition, the prisoners were reading more books and writing more letters than were the mainstream society adults.

Summary and Discussion

On the locus of control measures for academic tasks, both groups were more external than internal. These data are consistent with the results of survey of over 1000 adult illiterates attending reading classes in Britain. The results showed that these adults attributed their lack of success to "force of circumstances rather than to (their) own deficiencies" (Mace, 1975, p. 19). However, the prisoners were more external than the mainstream society adults in their perceptions of successful academic experiences.

As both subject groups talked of others and themselves, they were much more inclined to indicate external factors and self characteristics rather than self decision as contributing to successes and failures. In order to understand the role of control in attribution it is necessary to understand external and internal factors along a number of dimensions. These dimensions might include: globality, stability, and chronicity (Johnson and Winograd, 1983). Thus, whether an external situation or an internal trait is perceived as global, stable, and long term versus specific, variable, and short term will determine the degree of perceived control. From this perspective, certain external situations and internal traits (of a self characteristic

type) may contribute to similar attribute results since the individual may perceive a lack of control as common to both. For example, to an individual at a certain point in time, it may appear that lack of parent interest/involvement (external) or low ability (internal) may affect their perceptions over their control of learning in similar ways.. Lefcourt (1982) says, "No matter what the experiences one has, if they are not perceived as the results of one's own actions, they are not effective for altering the ways in which one sees things and consequently the way he functions" (p. 35). The nature of the suggestions by the adults for changing learning conditions were consistent with their attributions. The fact that over one-quarter of the mainstream society adults did not know what changes to suggest perhaps reflects long term helplessness (Johnson and Winograd, 1983). When an individual has never felt to have had any role in directing his/her learning or conditions of learning, it is understandable that a request to suggest changes is met by a shrug of the shoulders and a response, "It's just too much for me."

Johnson (1985) raised the question of how states of helplessness or passive failure arise and proposed that a key factor is feedback, particularly, feedback which is perceived as differential (discriminating). In the present study as both subject groups talked about their school experiences and the nature of teacher interactions, they quite often highlighted the matter of differential

treatment: "She had her favorites. I got stuck in the corner while she spent most of the time with the other kids." "He picked on me. I admit I wasn't a great kid but there were other kids just as bad". Johnson suggested that such treatment conveys to less able students the message that they are less capable of performing the required tasks. He describes the consequences in this way, "This attribution of failure to a cause for which there is little hope of a cure is profoundly unmotivating" (p. 171).

Implications

In order to foster literacy development, adults must take control of the conditions of learning. Since adults of this study also did not feel in control of non-academic events in their lives, it is necessary that adults fully understand their life circumstances, formulate their goals, decide how they can effect changes in these circumstances in light of their goals, and then relate these goals to literacy. Literacy programs for adults may be offered in conjunction with classes of a "life skills" nature in which issues of control and responsibility for events in one's life can be examined and decisions made or plans formulated in terms of developing such control.

Schools and adult literacy programs must constantly monitor policies and actions which foster external locus of control and attempt to change them. While teachers or tutors often are required to follow a particular curriculum, there is always enough flexibility so that at times the learners

can have input into suggested learning experiences. Certainly, in an adult literacy program, the direction of the program should follow from the learners' expressed needs.

Literacy needs differ for prisoners and for adults. Mainstream society adults who enroll in literacy programs are usually dissatisfied with their literacy standards and thus have specific goals which they wish to attain. Almost one-half of the prisoners were not enrolled in a literacy program in spite of the availability of such a program and many who were enrolled indicated that they did so to "pass the time" rather than to meet specific needs. The provision and success of literacy programs must be considered in light of these programs meeting specific needs.

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Synthesis (Chapter 5, 6): Adult Learners' Beliefs Regarding Reading and Writing

Low-literate adults' concepts of reading and writing (Chapter 5) are congruent with the nature of their skill and processing behavior (Chapters 3, 4). Reading and writing are generally viewed by these adults as simple activities in which the word (sounding-out, spelling) is the dominant unit.

Their concepts reflect how they believe they were taught reading and writing and influence how they feel their reading and writing might be improved. As Gorman (1981) (Chapter 5) suggests, these adults tend to have a deficit view of reading and writing; that is, they have been directed to the WHAT, the form, the mechanics of reading and writing, rather than to the generation of meaning and the accomplishment of specific purposes through reading and writing.

Furthermore, the adults have developed a dependency relationship with teachers in becoming literate. Their perceived role is not one of responsibility for their own learning but of "doing what the teacher says". Riby-Williams (1975) (Chapter 5) expresses it this way:

> They become wholly dependent on teachers for information and see no reason for the acquisition of knowledge if they haven't taken the course in school. But teachers are not going to be watching students once their formal education is at an end and it is counterproductive to have an educational structure in which the only responsibility a child has is to satisfy the particular needs of a particular teacher at a given time (p. 81).

Feelings of dependency are related to the attributions of the adults who tended to be more externally than internally controlled in their actions. Most of the suggestions for changes which could have enhanced their literacy development were of an external nature.

Interestingly, however, they rated their present standards of reading and writing against current needs in their lives. The prisoners whose needs were generally personal and more simplistic and more easily met, rated their reading and writing higher than that of the mainstream society adults, who were judging their literacy performance against standards in a literacy program or success in job attainment.

Both prisoners and mainstream society adults looked back on school as a very structured environment where interpersonal relations may be described as unidirectional and teacher-to-student directed. In contrast, there was greater need for them to initiate contact and interact with others in their adult lives in meeting their literacy needs. The nature of interpersonal relations in the classroom and impacts on literacy development are discussed in the next chapter.

Significant Concepts

concepts	mechanics	meaning
dependency	attribution	needs

CHAPTER 7

INTERPERSONAL CLASSROOM RELATIONS AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT*

Researchers such as Bloome (1983) and Wilcox (1982) have pointed out that literacy development is more than the transmission of a body of academic skills. Literacy, a cultural value, develops through the interaction of various individuals such as parents, children and teachers. That is, literacy development is a social activity for which most responsibility is borne by schools. Thus teachers cannot be viewed as data transmitters, independent of their goals, values, competencies, etc. or of the situation in which they exist, and in which there are many other participants. Literacy development is an interactive process, one in which teachers' expectations do not necessarily control outcomes; rather such outcomes are often modified or even forsaken as teachers and students react to each other's behavior (Bloome, 1983).

Literacy development occurs not merely through the exchange of skills, nor of ideas, but also of feelings (Glidewell, 1977). Bateson (1958) maintains that the study of the reactions of individuals to the reactions of other

* A version of this paper has been published.
Fagan, W.T. (1990). Socioaffective factors and literacy development. In S.P. Norris & L.M. Phillips (Eds.), Foundations of literacy policy in Canada. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises, Ltd.

individuals is a useful definition of that whole discipline referred to as social psychology. A student never acts as an individual in a school learning situation even when he/she is working on a task on his/her own, for even that task cannot be seen in isolation from what has gone before, what may come after, and even what is simultaneously happening around him/her. "The social context in which reading and writing are taught, learned, and used" can be either an enabling factor or a constraining one (Clark, 1984, p. 281). McDermott (1977) claims that the degree to which learning is successful in a classroom environment will depend upon the existence of "trusting relations" which relate to "how the teacher and children can understand each other's behavior as directed to the best interests of what they are trying to do together and how they can hold each accountable for any breach of the formulated consensus" (p. 199).

The purpose of this paper was to develop the thesis that interpersonal relations within the classroom are crucial in determining who succeeds and that patterns of interpersonal relations are established shortly after a child enters school, at which point many children are identified as belonging to a "minority" group status.

Differential Treatment Within the Classroom Setting

Studies (see Brown, Pallinsar and Purcell, 1986; Johnson and Winograd, 1983 for summaries) have shown that teachers differentially respond to minority groups in the

classroom and vice versa. While not excusable, it is understandable how teachers are able to separate minority groups based on racial characteristics such as skin color (Gougis, 1986) or even lower versus middle class status (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz, 1981). Such differential treatment may be explained on the basis of teacher bias. However, identifiable minorities are not the only students who fail in the social context of the classroom. Other students are also relegated to a minority status. In order to understand why this is so, it is necessary to expand the definition of minority. According to Bateson (1958), if it is the case that some individuals are more fitted for life in a particular culture, then those not so equally fitted may be considered a minority. McDermott (1974) believes that a minority or pariah or "at risk" status is achieved, not naturally acquired and that school is a prime example of an environment where a minority status is achieved because school sets the achievement standards.

As a cultural institution, school is concerned with promoting a definite set of values which reflect the dominant community (group) of which the school is a part. When children enter school it is the role of the teacher to initiate them into a particular set of identities or statuses (McDermott, 1974). Criteria for initiation, however, are set by the school, and are often so subtle that good intentioned teachers sometimes act similar to biased ones (McDermott, 1974). From the first contact with the

child, the teacher draws conclusions about how "school-wise" the child is. From that very first day, a number of children who are not considered "school-wise" become the minority - a status from which most never recover. Thus the teacher's imposition of a uniform set of standards makes visible a particular group of students who continue to be singled out within the context of the school. In other words, they have achieved their minority status. According to McDermott (1974), the mixture of such children and well-intentioned teachers "can bring about the same disastrous school records achieved by either neurologically disabled children or socially disabled, prejudiced teachers" (p. 82). McDermott maintains that "we have been measuring achievements with a biased set of standards" (p. 94). The school, by the nature of its operation, sets up minorities for failure (Erickson, 1984). McDermott (1977) states, "Our school system is harsh on those who fall behind; it sorts children out, labels them and finally pushes them aside" (p. 209). Many studies have documented the negative differential effects of the assignment of children to low groups for instructional purposes (See Allington, 1983; Brophy, 1983; Brown, Palincsar and Purcell, 1986; Hiebert, 1983; Johnson and Winograd, 1983, for summaries).

Why is it that some children do not meet the initiation standards set by schools? Part of the answer lies in the fact that prior to coming to school, children have already been initiated into a culture. McDermott (1974) states that

"Early experiences in the politics of everyday life determine the categories children develop for use in deciding how to act in similar situations at future times. In other words, the politics of everyday life socialize the identities, statuses and abilities of children" (p. 83). While Edmonds (1986) has pointed out the dangers of blaming the family for school failure, the cultural status of the family cannot be ignored as a crucial factor although the fault does not lie with the family. The problem occurs when different cultural statuses are seen as deficits rather than differences, and the school fails to take such differences into account. Thus rather than accepting these differences and working within them, the school sets up barriers which results in the collision of a host or dominant group (the school) and a minority group. McDermott (1974) expresses this notion of collision as follows:

> In these early stages of school, depending upon how the politics of everyday life are handled, the child defines his relations with his classmates and his teachers. These relations, remember, define the context of whatever information is to be transferred by a communicant. If the wrong messages of relationship are communicated, reading, writing, and arithmetic may take on very different meanings than they do for the child who is more successful in getting good feelings from the politics of the classroom (p. 90).

Heath (1981) has described home environments from which children come to school "school-wise" versus homes where the learning which takes place is not valued by the school. She has shown how middle-class mothers ask their children questions, similar to those which are asked in school. These

questions tend to be of a "known-answer" type - that is, the question is asked so that the children can display their knowledge - knowledge already possessed by the questioner. A common form of this kind of questioning involves soliciting attributes of objects - color, shape, etc.. Interestingly, one of the subtests of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA) entails this kind of questioning; failure to respond may result in the child being diagnosed as delayed with regards to expressive language. While the minority families of Heath's study provided just as rich an interaction, it was not valued nor accessed by the school. The possible unfortunate result of the home cultural differences documented by Heath (1981) and also be Au and Mason (1981) is that teachers immersed in the dominant culture of the school, and who are not aware of acceptable alternate forms of behavior, may on first contact with students from such cultures relegate them to a minority of language delayed, inattentive, hyperactive, socially immature, and possibly learning disabled.

Another important source of collision between the school and minority groups lies in the meaning which the school and literacy as goals or future aspirations, have for these groups. Teachers tend to believe that education (literacy development) is a good to which all children must aspire. Those who don't aspire to this good, are often viewed with disdain. In fact the term "illiterate" tends to have negative or undesirable connotations. As Spindler

(1974) states, "educational systems are often charged with responsibility for bringing about change in the culture (actually the minority cultures). They become or are intended to become agents of modernization" (p. 303). However, not all students are convinced of this futuristic nirvana which the school pretends to offer. Many students often know someone who aspired to this good, and who engaged in the appropriate school behaviors and attained it, yet they did not attain the promised resultant opportunities. To the students who know of such occurrences, the teacher's preaching of the merits of education and literacy, tends to lessen credibility for the teacher.

Not only does the pursuit and attainment of literacy as a goal not always lead to reward upon leaving school, but also it often has little meaning for the students while they are attending school. Literacy as taught in schools is often environmentally sterile. Venezky (1990) refers to such literacy as "vanilla literacy". Children are drilled on phonics, they answer questions and complete workbook exercises. Somehow this is supposed to pay off for the diligent, the involved. There is no obvious relationship between the so called literacy activities in school and the literacy activities outside of school - the reading for pleasure, taking phone messages, writing notes, reading forms, checking prices. Those children who do not buy into the school's notion of literacy may find themselves in a minority group.

While the above discussion focusses on subcultures or groups as homogeneous entities, it must be remembered that any particular group is made up on a number of individuals. Heredity as well as environment play a role in the individual's dispositions (Bateson, 1958). Consequently, siblings who encounter a similar home subculture may react differently to the reactions of others within that environment. Even if all other things were equal, the environment is different for them in that each has a different sibling. Consequently, all conflicts with the dominant culture of the school cannot be viewed merely as a "group factor". Personality or the idiosyncratic characteristics of individuals cannot be overlooked as a possible source of conflict.

A Framework for Understanding Interpersonal Relations

The very first meeting of teachers and children becomes the pendulum of their interpersonal relations. From this first meeting these interpersonal relations may be harmonious or conflicting; they may swing back and forth within limits. Human interaction is developmental; it is never static. Bateson (1958) suggests that the status quo is really a dynamic equilibrium in which changes are constantly taking place. On one occasion these changes may result in ethological contrast, while at other times changes may actually counteract this movement towards differentiation.

The developmental interpersonal relations may be explained within a number of models including the schismogene-

sis model of Bateson (1958) and the interdependence matrix model of Kelley and Thibaut (1978). According to Kelley and Thibaut, a matrix may be "constituted by specifying the behaviors important to the relationship that each ... (participant) may enact and by assessing the consequences of all possible combinations of their respective behaviors" (p. 3). However, as McClintock (cited in Kelley and Thibaut, 1978) points out, the interactive behaviors of participants must be interpreted in terms of the goals held by each; such goals may be proximal or distal. While teachers often profess distal goals (the positive outcomes of schooling), they often enact more proximal goals as when their intent is to ensure that students adhere to the current rules or standards of the school. Thus, on one hand, the teacher has the student's best interests at heart, but, on the other hand, puts the school as a functioning organism above the interests of the student. The tension between the mutual and unilateral interest of the participants is represented by Kelley and Thibaut in Figure 1. The unbroken curved line indicates trust building whereas the broken curves represent conflict.

Trust building in Kelley and Thibaut's model is similar to the notion of harmony or state of mutuality in Bateson's (1958) model. However, when mutuality or trust building breaks down, a process of differentiation or schismogenesis occurs and which results "from the cumulative interaction between individuals" (Bateson, 1958, p. 175). When

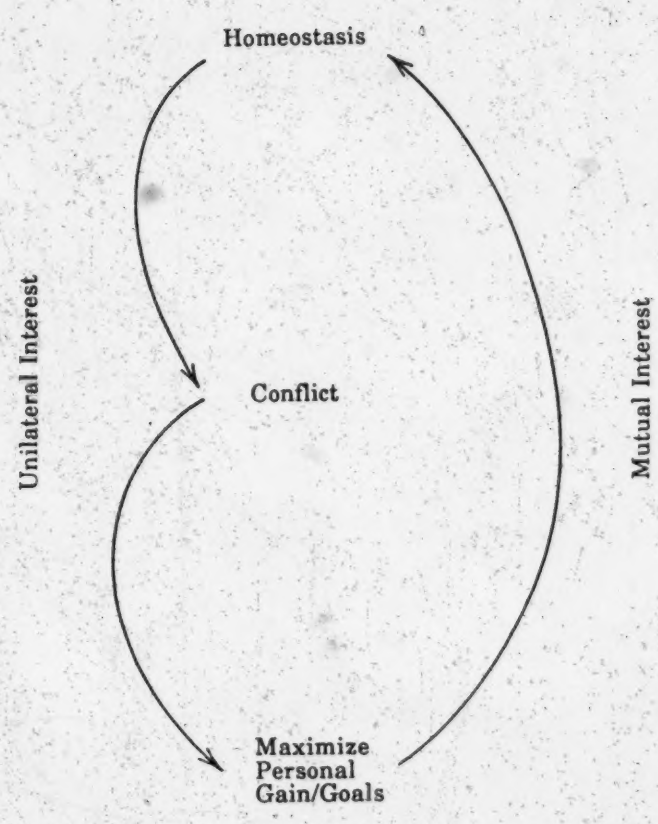

Figure 1: Tension Betwen Mutual and Unilateral Interests
(Modified from Kelley and Thibaut, 1978, p. 231)

differentiation is not redressed, it may take two forms - complementary or symmetrical schismogenesis. In both of these forms of change, there is a host and a minority. The nature of interpersonal relations may be represented diagrammatically as in Figure 2. This figure is a modification of a diagrammatic representation of stress reactions to reading by Gentile and McMillan (1988).

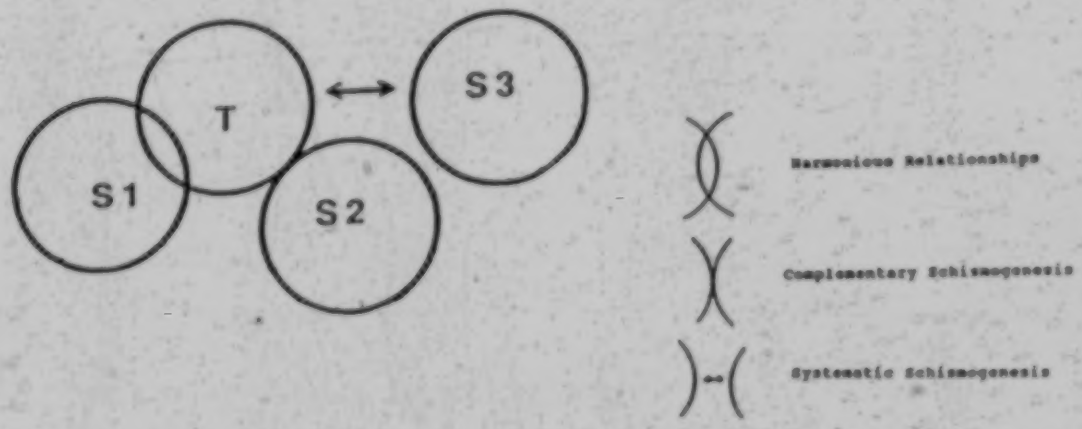

Figure 2: Interpersonal Relationships: Teacher-Students

Complementary Schismogenesis

In complementary schismogenesis (represented by the touching circles) the minority accepts a passive or subservient role. Some children establish this role out of fear. They fear the teacher and the teacher's punishment if they do not meet with his/her expectations. Consequently they do their work, do not create discipline problems, and are respectful, at least on the surface. Complementary

schismogenesis is reinforced if these children also live in fear of the home environment, should they violate school rules. Shor and Freire (1987) think of these students as living in a "culture of silence" in which "Some silent students dutifully copy down notes and follow the teacher's voice. Others sit silently and daydream, unplugged from the repulsive conditions of the classroom" (p. 122). When interpersonal relations of this type have been established, students often band together in support of each other, not so much anti-teacher as pro-student (Wolcott, 1974). The whisper of a word to a peer who stumbles when reading orally, the passing of a note with an answer are attempts to keep the peer from being detected, from being singled out. Such behavior (as long as it is not known to the teacher), in actual fact, reinforces the complementarity of the situation.

However, Bateson cautions that there are always limits - even the pendulum when pushed too far may snap. Some students are more inclined to react with anger and resentment "provoked by the imposition of tedium and orthodoxy on them" (Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 122). However, they are unlikely to express this hostility openly, at least in the presence or knowledge of the teacher. Others may regress to a state of helplessness and hopelessness - a state which is often reinforced by their allocation to the lowest instructional group which, according to McDermott

(1974) is a way of organizing the statuses and identities of children in the class.

A rather disturbing fact about the relegation of children to a low reading group as a form of complementary schismogenesis is that their fate is often sealed on their admittance to the group. Cazden (1981) showed that when children who tested similarly in terms of reading achievement were assigned to groups, those who were assigned to a low group performed more like poor readers, while those assigned to a higher group were more likely to perform like good readers. Considering such data, it is not surprising that Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1984) concluded that "It is not so much ability that determines the future attainment of a young student but the reading group into which the child is initially placed" (p. 90).

In actual fact three types of students may exist within a pattern of complementary schismogenesis. These include: (a) those who passively accept the situation and who tend to develop a learned helplessness syndrome, (b) those who seethe with anger and resentment but who give the appearance of "buying into the system", who are not trouble-makers and who tend to be dismissed by the teacher as not worth bothering about, and (c) students who are actually part of the dominant student body in the sense that they achieve; these are usually very bright students who either are able to get by through doing little work, and/or who by their ingenuity can scheme their way through. They are usually

bored by school and do not see school as a challenge. Their level of intelligence is often not recognized by the teacher.

Symmetrical Schismogenesis

When differentiation evolves within a symmetrical schismogenesis pattern it tends to be characterized by conflict and open hostility rather than by the passivity (circles not touching in Figure 2). Shor and Freire (1987) refer to this conflict as cultural sabotage (p. 123). They maintain that "passivity is not a natural condition of childhood or adulthood" (p. 123) and they believe that "Students who sabotage the symbolic violence of the curriculum are defending their autonomy" although often in "self-destructive, and confused ways" (p. 123). Students within a symmetrical schismogenesis pattern resort to "fight" or "flight" (Gentile & McMillan, 1988). Those who resort to flight opt out of the school milieu through removal (hookey, expulsion) and consequently it is unlikely that they achieve. Those, who fight, engage in open conflict. Unless there are counteracting forces, these, too, tend to be failures within the school system.

Student-teacher conflict can be understood within resistance theory (Erickson, 1984). That is, students who are relegated to a minority status by the school refuse to cooperate with the school's diagnosis of them as failures. Consequently, rather than "buckling under" and assisting with the school's self-fulfilling prophecy, they fight back,

which accords them a "more acceptable self-image than does agreement with the school's definition" (Erickson, 1984, p. 538). The importance of self-image is also stressed by Johnson (1985) from his work with adult illiterates. He suggests that it is perhaps in this context that the label "dyslexic" has value - a liberating social value to protect their image as failures.

When students resist, teachers sometimes attempt to control through status degradation which according to McDermott (1977) leads to "impersonal warfare, rather than trust and accountability" (p. 206). Consequently, many "children spend their time in relational battles rather than on learning tasks" (p. 206). The outcome of resistance by students depends on how much peer support students can mobilize. If there is sufficient, then the teacher finds himself/herself without the support of counteracting forces and leadership status normally accorded the teacher is then accorded the students. In this situation the teacher has lost control.

However, rather than such mutuality or harmony existing among peers, peer relations may also tend to be marked by complementary and symmetrical schismogenesis patterns - the same differentiation patterns that characterize teachers' and students' interpersonal relations. Richek, List and Learner (1983) report a large body of evidence "that shows that poor achievers tend to be rejected by their classmates in school" (p. 30). In fact, Asher, Renshaw and Hymel (1982)

maintain that not only are positive peer relations as important as support mechanisms in classrooms, but peer relations correlate with adjustment in later life. Figure 3 attempts to depict the complexity of the interpersonal relationships that may occur in the classroom, between teacher and student, and student and student.

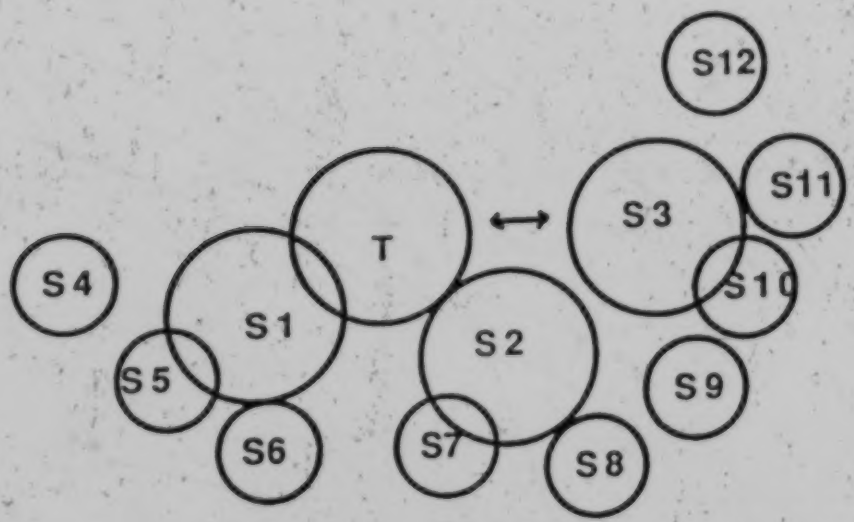

Figure 3: Complexity of Interpersonal Classroom Relationships: Teacher-Students-Students

Support for a Schismogenesis Model of Teacher-Student-Student Interaction

Data from a group of mainstream society adults and a group of achieving grade 9 students (scoring at least one-half standard deviation above the mean on a standardized reading achievement test) were analyzed in support of the

model. There were 26 individuals in each group. Through interviews it was ascertained that all adults had had negative experiences with school, while the achieving grade nine students related well to their school environment. From the data, three conclusions in support of a schismogenesis model of interpersonal classroom relationships were drawn: (1) that some children enter school possessing values and statuses not congruent with those of the school (McDermott, 1974), (2) that these children are likely to be singled out within the organization of the school (Au and Mason, 1981; Bateson, 1958; Heath, 1981; McDermott, 1974), and (3) that the interpersonal relations of these children can be described as complementary or symmetrical schismogenesis (Bateson, 1958; Erickson, 1984; Johnson and Winograd, 1983; McDermott, 1977; Shor and Freire, 1987).

Prior to entering school, the adults had achieved a status not congruent with that recognized by the school.

The adults came from different type home environments than did the grade nine students. A larger proportion of the parents of the adults worked at unskilled or semiskilled jobs. Both sets of homes seemed to exemplify different values for literacy. Almost all the grade nines had been read to and had seen others reading and writing from their very early years. Seventy percent of them had been read to on a daily basis. This was in contrast with the adults, of whom, only one-half or fewer had engaged in similar activi-

ties. Less than 15 percent had been read to on a daily basis.

Almost one-half of the non-institutional adults and 60 percent of the prisoners remembered disliking the idea of starting school as compared to only nine percent of the grade 9 students. On entering school, the adults did not find school accommodating to their manner of acting upon the world. Between 65 and 75 percent of the adults thought of school as a fairly structured environment where children had no input into decisions. One adult described school as a place where "the teacher had it all laid out or else", and another commented that she could never imagine how it would be possible to sit in a desk day after day, year after year for 12 years and listen to a teacher. Over one-half of the grade 9 students believed they had considerable input into how they experienced school.

It seemed as if the adults, as children entered school already in conflict with the school's values and its expected status for children. McDermott (1974) argues that schools must accept children as they are rather than maintaining values which set them apart and make them visible as a minority. He believes that "The children are often more adaptable than their teachers. They are able and willing to develop new codes, indeed they do so every day on the playground. However, if the new code is used to degrade the children, as in the case for children in 'lower' ability groups, they will take flight and cut themselves off from

whatever rewards the new code has to offer them" (p. 107). McDermott concludes that children do not come to school disadvantaged; they leave disadvantaged (pp. 86-87).

Children who were not compatible with the school's expectations became visible minorities within the school environment.

During their school career almost all of the prisoners had been assigned to a lower ability group or a special class for instructional purposes. This compares to 19 of the mainstream society adults. Six of the grade 9 students had been assigned to higher ability groups. About one-half of the adults, already believing they were failures, accepted group placement as an opportunity for help. The other half, however, were inclined to believe they were put into groups for the teacher's convenience. A number of adults felt that group placement was the start of their problems from which they did not recover. They felt embarrassed and ashamed in front of their peers, felt segregated and the victims of differential treatment. One adult said, "It seemed like the teacher was more interested in fast learners and while I wanted to learn, the teacher didn't pay attention to me. It seemed like I held up my arms for hours and then gave up."

Once identified as visible minorities, the relationships of such children with their teachers and other children were likely to be characterized within a complementary or symmetrical schismogenesis framework.

About one-half of the mainstream society adults, but less than one-fifth of the prisoners could be described within a complementary schismogenesis framework. The behavior of these adults as children is best summed up by one adult, "I was never a teacher botherer." These adults felt that teachers disliked them because they were not "good students", "because their work wasn't of high quality", or "because they "came from the wrong side of the tracks." These adults were inclined to stay in school; some went to school for as many as 14 years even though their level of achievement was low and they experienced considerable failure. Perhaps, a factor in their remaining in school was that at some point in their school career, about one-half of them encountered a teacher who they felt really cared about them and this gave them hope.

One-half of the mainstream society adults and the majority of the prisoners' relationships with teachers and other children may be best described as symmetrical schismogenesis. They felt that they were discriminated against and didn't get a fair chance. They were more likely to be punished for work left unfinished and felt that the teacher looked for an excuse to pick on them while turning a blind eye to other students' behavior. As one adult commented, "The vice-principal's kid could get away with anything." Almost all of the prisoners were also more likely to have been punished for tasks other than school work; this com-

pared to 16 of the mainstream society adults and 9 of the grade 9 students.

The prisoners, especially, were very much in a conflict situation with the dominant culture of the school. A small number took flight and avoided school through playing hookey. Others had usually joined peer gangs. One subject said, "You don't get no rewards in school for not knowing how to read, but with your friends that doesn't count." The majority resorted to "fight" and openly opposed school policy; their infractions were more serious than those committed by the grade 9 students or even the mainstream society adults. Their behavior was a good example of symmetrical schismogenesis being pushed to its limits of acceptability. In fact some disregarded society conventions in their conflict with the culture represented by the school. Two students dealt drugs while in school. Two of the prisoners committed their first crimes in junior high by assaulting an assistant principal.

This group of adults, as children, were also more likely to run into open conflict with their peers which often resulted in intricate scenarios. For example, one adult (as a child), one day beat up on some kids who were ridiculing him and he was sent to the vice-principal's office for punishment. The vice-principal declared that he would be expelled for two weeks. He said he left the office upset that he, and not the kids who started the playground fracas, was punished and he was fearful of the consequences

when his parents would find out. He said that he just wanted to get away so he went to the school parking lot and took one of the teacher's cars for a joy ride. This, of course, landed him in trouble with the law, and confirmed the vice-principal's belief that he was a "good-for-nothing".

These adults typified McDermott's (1977) portrait of students who spent more time in relational battles than on school tasks. It is little wonder that the majority saw school in general, and literacy in particular, as meaningless in their lives. For those who thought otherwise, they believed their chances for literacy attainment were minimal. The experiences of the grade 9 achieving students stand out in contrast. They were not singled out by school standards on their entrance to school, unless to be accorded a special status (high ability group placement). While the behaviors of some of them differed at times from the school's standards, the pendulum never swung too far and they seemed to be achieving according to the school's goals within an environment that was generally mutually satisfying for them, that is, in harmony with their teachers and their peers.

Implications

Goodlad (1984) stated, "If we are to improve school, we must understand it" (p. xvi). School, according to Goodlad, is more than academic, it also comprises personal social relations, which if negative, can be detrimental to learning. Amoroso (1984) concluded that the "need for teachers to be caring and supportive is central to the

concept of literacy as an act of becoming someone" (p. 19). The goals of the school cannot be separated from the students who enter; school should provide a satisfying experience for all. This, of course, necessitates that teachers attempt to understand the statuses and identities which children possess as they come to school and then modify the school agenda to accommodate various strengths and needs.

Teachers much be aware of school standards which are used (often subconsciously) to create visible minorities of "high risk", potentially "low-achieving children". Schools should be for children, rather than vice versa. This is not to say that schools should not be aware of individual differences. School, in fact, is about individuality, but individuality based on child criteria rather than school criteria. Guild and Garger (1985) state:

> If education is a people business, and if we know people are different, then education is a business about the diversity of people. It is about the different goals people have for education. It is about the different programs people want in schools. It is about the multitude of values and interests of all its constituents (p. 5).

Providing a literacy program based on an understanding of individual differences means understanding the literacy environment and literacy needs of the students. School is not a place where literacy occurs and then somehow the students find a place for it in their lives. School, as part of students' lives, should provide literacy in meaningful

contexts. Granted there are literacy skills which are more suitable for development in school; however, the use of these skills in various meaningful literacy tasks should be clear to the students. Literacy materials of the classroom should not consist just of textbook materials, but a range of reading and writing tasks from students' own lives - from reading for enjoyment to understanding a bus transfer (provided they transfer buses).

Given the diversity of individual differences (including the teachers), there is always the possibility of some students experiencing difficulty with academic tasks. However, Erickson (1984) reminds us "that we need to move beyond simple, single-factor explanations of school failure in literacy and reasoning" (p. 540). Children should never be locked into groups. There may be times when students are grouped for special needs; in these cases the children should always understand why this is so.

There is also likely to be interpersonal conflict. Any institution, including the school must operate by a set of guidelines. As Shor and Freire (1987) say, a teacher must express authority, but not be authoritarian. Also as Bateson (1958) indicates, schismogenesis does not have to go inevitably forward. The teacher may intercept by varying the roles - participating in activities (games) where the teacher becomes a peer, allowing groups to set up group goals for a particular project, changing tasks that are threatening, and by lightening a situation through humor.

Finally, as Bateson (1958) points out, there may be instances when schismogenesis leads to discomfort between teacher and students - almost on a collision course. Rather than blindly pursuing this course, Wolcott (1974) suggests that the teacher, at least step back, and take stock of the situation. He suggests that the teacher, in such a situation, consider himself/herself the enemy, and the student as a prisoner of war, whom the teacher is trying to persuade to defect to his/her side by showing the student what the school has to offer. Wolcott states that such a stance forces the teacher to come to grips with what the school really has to offer this student that is meaningful and desirous; it also directs the teacher's attention not to the student as a recalcitrant, but to the student's community with its history and its values.

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Synthesis (Chapter 7): Interpersonal Relations

Literacy is not merely an academic or cognitive enterprise; it is also personal, interpersonal, and social. In some situations or environments, the latter often transcend the former in determining whether or not literacy shall be attained.

School is sometimes viewed by low-literate adults as a very structured environment (Chapter 6). The rigidity of certain school environments often create exclusive settings in which those children who come to school already immersed in the school's value system, are readily accepted, while those who have not bought into that value system are often identified and experience differential and even discriminatory behavior.

Two umbrella interpersonal relations networks may be used to describe these students. The interpersonal relations of one group may be characterized as complementary schisomogenesis, which is marked by passivity, boredom, helplessness, and hopelessness. There may be underlying hostility on the part of the students. The interpersonal relations of the second group may be described within a symmetrical schismogenesis framework, the two most characteristic behaviors being flight and fight.

The main implication for literacy development is that cognitive energy which an individual may have to devote to academic type literacy tasks is diverted to interpersonal-

social relationships. As McDermott (1977) states, "children spend their time in relational battles rather than on learning tasks" (p. 206) (Chapter 7). Wolcott (1974) (Chapter 7) encourages teachers to examine interpersonal conflict in terms of the history and values of the community from which the student comes, rather than in judging the student as uninterested, uncooperative, and a recalcitrant.

Significant Concepts

interpersonal social differential behavior

CHAPTER 8

LITERACY IN THE LIVES OF TWO GROUPS OF LOW-LITERATE ADULTS*

There is an increasing emphasis on adult literacy in Canada, particularly in light of the publication of the Literacy in Canada Report (1987) and increased funding by the Federal Government (Secretary of State, 1988). However, studies have shown that over one-third of those who enroll in adult literacy programs drop out during the first half of the program (Hunter and Harman, 1979; Rigg and Kazemek, 1983). Rigg and Kazemek suggest that one reason for this is that adult learners have no input into the nature of the program; their goals, and the meaningfulness of the program for their lives are not considered. Thistlewaite (1983) advises that literacy programs must be based on a knowledge of the "general characteristics of adult learners, specifically as they apply to reading (and writing)" (p. 16). While educators or journalists may have definite views on the significance of literacy and make these views known through their writing, or through the provision of adult literacy programs, the adults who are considered illiterate, get little opportunity to relate what (il)literacy means to

* A version of this paper has been published.
Fagan, W.R. (1989). Literacy in the lives of two groups of low-literate adults. Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations, 4, 50-54.

them. Certainly, these views are essential if policy makers and program developers are to provide programs that are meaningful to their clientele. One purpose of this study was to describe the views of low-literate adults on literacy and literacy related experiences and on their involvement in literacy programs. Since the thrust of literacy programs in Canada is generally directed at two populations: mainstream society adults and prison inmates, a second purpose of this study was to determine the similarity or differences of the views on literacy of these two groups. While programs in Canada are directed towards Federal and Provincial prisoners, the latter were chosen for this study since their literacy programs are provincially funded, and in this way are comparable to the programs provided for the mainstream society adults.

The prisoners in this study were functioning at the same mean reading achievement level as the non-prisoners, and had attended school for approximately the same number of years. Furthermore, many had grown up in the same or similar communities, and had attended the same schools as the mainstream society adults. Therefore, there was no reason to believe that the role of literacy in the prisoners' lives before incarceration would differ from that of the non-prisoners. However, in light of the general higher rate of illiteracy within prisons (Hunter and Harman, 1979), perceived differences between prisoners and others in academic programs (Duguid, 1985), and the reticence of

prisoners to participate in literacy programs (Nixon and Bumbarger, 1983), there was the possibility of different literacy roles characterizing both groups at the time of the study. While programs for both groups of subjects originate from a common source, any differences in the perceived role of literacy and literacy programs by both groups must be considered in planning and implementing programs.

The significance of "society" is often overlooked in definitions of adult literacy. Fingeret's (1983) study of low-literate adults points out that within the larger society there exist social networks which provide security and support for such individuals and which include provisions for meeting literacy needs. These networks vary - from being fairly open or mobile to closed. Such social networks as described by Fingeret, however, are not necessarily harmonious in the sense that all literacy needs are met within the group. Individuals often endeavour to do something about their perceived literacy deficits outside of the group. This is inevitable for as Raymond (1982) points out, "When a society involves literate and illiterate people living in the same political-economic system, . . . the acquisition of literacy is not experienced as a cultural evolution" (p. 9). A key implication is that an individual's goals (Amoroso, 1984) and the environmental conditions are significant factors in determining the attainment of increased literacy skills (Giroux, 1981; Huntr and Harman, 1979; Pillay, 1986).

Method

Procedure

The data were obtained through individual open-ended interviews. For each subject, each session lasted from approximately three hours to a day and a half. The interview was interwoven around various tasks and questionnaires. The purpose was to obtain qualitative data from which could be abstracted a sequence of events and insights into the lives of two groups of adults. Frequently, a point raised by a subject was returned to at a later point for clarification and/or elaboration. Also when, what appeared to be a significant point, was raised by a particular subject, this was checked out with other subjects which often meant talking to subjects already interviewed. Examples of questions, from which other questions and probing emanated, were as follows: Why did you leave school before graduation? What are some jobs you have worked at since you left school? While we are in school we often dream about what we want to do when we leave school. Did you have such dreams? What were they? When you have to read and write something which is too difficult, what do you do? Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you got a raw deal, a poor product, poor service, or made a mistake in something you bought? Tell me about it. Have you ever voted? About how often? In which elections - federal? provincial? municipal? Can you tell me the name of the prime minister of Canada? How do you feel about the political system? Why are you enrolled in a

literacy upgrading program now? Do you think you will achieve your goal? Why/not?

All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed according to the areas probed. Unordered meta-matrices were first constructed for all questions that were common across the subjects with a supplementary matrix for each subject of "unique" questions. The data were searched for patterns within subject groups and comparison/contrasts across groups. When feasible, data were quantified and totals were calculated. After the data had been analyzed, and descriptive statements formulated, "member checks" as advocated by Guba and Lincoln (1985) were carried out. This entailed discussing the findings with approximately 20 percent of the sample (within the previous stratifications), seeking their comments regarding the validity of the findings or asking questions for clarification. All findings were confirmed and occasionally subjects volunteered additional examples to illustrate various points.

Results

Leaving School

Since adult literacy programs in Canada are only available to those who have left school, it is at this point that the story of the low-literate adult begins. For the majority of these adults, school was not a satisfactory experience and they left before they had completed the program. However, for the small number who did stay until the end of the program, their entry into the adult world did not

include academic success as indicated by the reading achievement test administered in this study. Table 1 provides comparative data on the school level reached by both groups.

Table 1

Level Reached in Regular School

	Prisoners	Mainstream Society Adults
Completed Program	4	8
High School	6	10
Junior High	12	4
Elementary	4	4

The mainstream society adults were more inclined to progress farther within school than were the prisoners. The earlier drop-out rate by the prisoners may be due to the fact that there had been a much higher failure rate among them as opposed to the mainstream society adults. While 21 of the prisoners and 22 of the mainstream society adults recalled failing a grade, 60 percent of the prisoners failed more often. One subject, for example, recalled failing every grade from one through eight.

Even though several of these adults reached highschool and even stayed until the completion of the program, they were aware that they had not learned a lot. One adult (prisoner) who reached grade 10 said, "Well, I suppose I could say I reached grade 10, but what does this really mean? I knew I could do grade 10 math, but I was only a

grade 3 in English." A second adult (mainstream) said, "I reached grade 10 but I can't say I learned anything." Some felt deceived by the school as to the nature of their achievement. One subject who had completed the program said, "They gave me a certificate but it sure don't mean much. I learned that the hard way". Another who had been passed to grade 10 said, "I was told I had completed grade 9 but then I found out that I didn't have grade 9. I was in grade 10 without a grade 9; I was very disappointed."

The reasons for the adults leaving school were grouped into the categories used in the Literacy in Canada Report (1987): impediments, motivation, and the school system. While the reasons for leaving school were similar across groups (Table 2), there were differences within these categories. As a group, the prisoners tended to be more "anti-social" in their behavior and were more inclined to be in conflict with school policies. Two of the prisoners were in trouble with the law in junior high because they had assaulted a school administrator. The prisoners were more inclined to be "fed up" with the school system and resented being failed ("When I was old enough I quit. I had to get out then. I was being suffocated"). Some of the Native Peoples found themselves in a cultural conflict ("I had learned to like school and to rely on it to help me in life. But when I moved (to a white school) I just couldn't understand where they were coming from and where I was supposed to fit in".)

Table 2

Reasons for Leaving School

	Prisoners	Mainstream Society Adults
Impediments	Trouble with the law (4)	Illness, marriage, distance (4)
Motivation	Peer influence (4) Boredom (9)	Parent influence (3) Boredom (9)
School System	Program finished (4) Conflicts (5)	Program finished (8) Conflicts (2)

While the reasons for leaving school were similar to those given by illiterate adults in the Southam literacy study (Literacy in Canada, 1987), the percentages differed within categories. For example, while 50 percent of the illiterate adults in the Southam literacy study cited impediments as the reason for dropping out of school, only 15 percent of either group of subjects in the present study gave this response. The main reason as stated by 50 and 46 percent of the mainstream society adults and the prisoners, respectively, was lack of motivation. However, when one considers the statistics of the Literacy in Canada research report by age groups, there is a much greater similarity between the subjects' responses of both studies. For the subjects between the ages of 18 and 34 in that study, 51 percent gave lack of motivation as the main reason for leaving school. Over 95 of the subjects within the present study fell within this age bracket. Thus for "younger

adults", motivational factors, including lack of interest in the program, and lack of awareness of the meaningfulness of the program led to their dropping out of school.

Shattered Dreams: Work Goals and Work Experiences

Nine of the mainstream society adults were working full or parttime at the time of the study; 5 were attending academic upgrading programs full time, while 12 were on welfare. However, all adults had worked at some point since leaving school; this was in contrast to the prisoners, four of whom had not held a job since leaving school. Of the mainstream society adults who were employed at the time of the study, 2 were in managerial or executive positions, 2 were in trades, and the remainder in unskilled jobs. Four of the mainstream society adults were making more than $30,000, including one of the people in an unskilled job. One person was making more than $60,000 per year. The adults (mainstream society and prisoners) had at some point worked at more than 49 different types of jobs, of which 11 were trades oriented.

Like most individuals, the subjects while in school, had dreams of what they would do with their lives after leaving school. Goals were somewhat similar across groups (Table 3). However, approximately 20 percent of both groups either had nothing in mind or simply wanted "to get a job". One subject said, "When I was in school I never thought about what I wanted out of it, but when you're out five or six years, you really begin to think about it." Except for 5

of the 9 mainstream society adults who were employed at time of the study, the remainder (including all of the prisoners) had not been happy with their job situations since leaving school.

Table 3

Work Goals While in School

	Prisoners	Mainstream Society Adults
Occupations		
Professional	3	5
Skill/Trade	8	11
Military/Police	3	3
Sports	2	-
Laborer	4	2
None	6	5

Coping Strategies

Many of the mainstream society adults were able to cope with their literacy needs "which made it possible for them to take on many personal, family, and community responsibilities" (Lytle, Marmor, & Penner, 1986, p. 31). One of the adults in this study taught a Sunday school class, yet couldn't read a word. His wife went over the text with him the previous night until he had it memorized. However, he said he was always terrified that a child would ask him a question which would necessitate his attending to a particular line of print. Many of the adults had a trusted friend. One subject told of asking such a friend to help her

fill out an application for a job. In another case (while the researcher was interviewing an adult), a neighbour dropped in to borrow an iron and the adult seized the opportunity to hand her a letter (business) when she was leaving, to read for her. The prisoners seemed to be part of a much more closely knit social network, no doubt influenced by the various restrictions imposed on them and by the constancy of seeing the same people and in the same roles. They did not hesitate to ask anyone who was near to help them with a reading or writing task. However, they would have first "sounded out" whether this person knew more than they did. For this reason they often asked a guard. One of them told of getting into trouble in this way once when he asked a female guard to read a letter for him which contained much "raw" language and she felt that he had done it on purpose.

There were some adults (both mainstream society adults and prisoners) who did not have a trusted friend within their immediate social networks and who turned to people outside of these networks for help. A person in business took much of his work to his tutor; a prisoner held on to a letter for two months and asked the researcher to read it for him. When the services of an individual were not available, the adults had developed a number of ingenious ways of coping with their literacy needs. One adult, responsible for ordering supplies, told of his skill in delegating authority and he would often ask junior members

in his business to take inventory and make a list of what was needed and then to check these items in the catalogue. He had devised a numbering system so that he could match a picture with the written form on the inventory. When he had to order he would "barricade" himself in his office and go through the catalogue and find what he needed and then select the words to fill out the request form. Another told of writing key words from an application form on his hand (Social Insurance Number, Previous Employer, etc.) and then matching these to the form when he went to apply for work. An executive attempted to cover up his illiteracy by stressing his need to be organized and for this he enlisted his secretary's help. For example, if there was a sales interview or a meeting coming up, he would dictate to his secretary the particular items he needed and the order in which he wanted them. He could then cross check the items against the tape to know what he had. He also felt that he could cover up his lack of literacy ability by his good PR skills and his ability to "talk". Another adult told of buying books and newspapers and of "looking at" them, and another related how in restaurant, he always ordered the special of the day. A smaller number told of "avoiding print" - of never carrying a pen or pencil, nor of getting involved in situations where something had to be written. One adult told of a humorous incident. His wife had been looking for a parttime job and he mentioned this to some of his co-workers. One of them knew of this clergyman who

needed a parttime housekeeper. The adult asked his co-worker to write "Parttime help" and the phone number. At the end of the day he couldn't find the piece of paper but finally spotted what he thought was the paper on another worker's desk and which "looked like" what his friend had written. He thought it had fallen on the floor and someone had put it there by mistake. His wife called the number and wasn't pleased. The paper he brought home contained the phone number of a massage parlour.

Resolving Consumer Conflicts

Nineteen of the mainstream society adults and 14 of the prisoners recalled a specific consumer situation with which they had not been satisfied. Incidents included such things as being unsatisfied with a clothing purchase (mostly because of an incorrect size), being sold an item that soon didn't function (usually a car), poor restaurant service, being stuck with a bill (long distance; someone not having money to pay at a restaurant or bar), being cheated out of wages, not being repaid a loan, or refused permission to re-enroll in an academic upgrading program. The mainstream society adults and the prisoners dealt with such situations differently.

Twelve of the mainstream society adults were more inclined not to complain and to try and forget about it and chalk it up to experience. One possible reason why they were not inclined to seek redress surfaced when they talked about their literacy goals. Several of them felt they didn't have

the "proper" language to make their point. One adult described it this way, "In situations I feel embarrassed by my lack of education. I don't know how to approach a person and use words to analyze and describe a situation. And then when I get mixed up I get all confused and frustrated and I have a quick temper and I usually end up making a mess of things".

These adults seemed to be rather subservient in such situations. One said that she wouldn't dare complain because that would make her look stupid for having purchased the "wrong" item; another said that she would rather suffer for her mistake (wearing shoes that didn't fit) rather than let people know she had made a bad choice which she thought would reflect on her as a person. Another person who was docked wages because the supervisor said he was late (he indicated to the researcher that he wasn't), apologized to the supervisor because he had learned never to talk back to superiors. Of those who did seek redress for a poor transaction, two talked to a manager or supervisor, while 5 talked to a worker (sales clerk, waitress, etc.). All but one got satisfaction.

The prisoners had employed a different approach to resolving a bad transaction. Four of them decided to forget about it or deal with it themselves, for example paying a bill they were stuck with. However, they were only inclined to do this if a close friend or relative were involved. In fact, one who had bought a car which immediately fell apart,

took great de-light in fixing up the car and showing it to the friend from whom he had bought it. Ten of the 14 prisoners who had reported a bad transaction perceived the "injustice" as being intentional or due to carelessness on the part of the other party, and did not seem aware of appropriate channels through which this situation might be redressed. Conse-quently, they were more inclined to use force to have it resolved. Sometimes this was a "confrontation" with the person involved (and while there was no use of physical force, they felt that the other party was aware of this possibility). In some cases, there was physical force, which ranged from assault to destruction of property. One subject, for example, who felt he had been cheated out of wages for working on a farm, took a haylift and drove it into a swamp.

The World of Politics

The subjects of this study had even less success in their dealings with the political environment than as consumers in a business environment. Data are presented in Table 4.

Mainstream society adults were more knowledgeable of political leaders and were more inclined to vote. The prisoners, of course, did not have the right to vote while incarcerated, and some had spent as many as ten years in jail. Not only were they deprived of the right to vote while they were in jail, they were also less likely to interact with others who "talked politics". However, many subjects

Table 4

Knowledge of Political Figures and Voting Record

	Prisoners	Mainstream Society Adults
Prime Minister	7	15
Premier	4	11
Mayor	4	16
Voting Record		
-Federal	4	6
-Provincial	0	3
-Municipal	1	2
Reasons for not Voting		
-Unfamiliar with process	5	8
-Not interested	9	6
-No faith in politics	11	8

from both groups were aware of various issues (usually from TV) and had formulated opinions about the political system. A large number of both groups had ruled out politics (and government) as an answer to peoples' dilemmas. One mainstream society adult said, "It doesn't really make any difference who is in; every guy is the same as the last one. They make promises and break them." The prisoners were much more adamant in their criticism of the political process. Typical comments from this group of subjects were:

> They should put more money into schools so that people can read by the time they reach grade 12.
>
> It's a screwed up system. They beat around the bush and you never get a straight answer.
>
> They take us for a ride - give us hope and then dash us down. We got promised employment. Look at the

economy. There are no jobs. There must be more money for educational and social programs.

Nothing will change.

The way they scream at one another and call each other names doesn't seem to me to be the way to solve the country's problems. With that kind of model and leadership, no wonder we're in a mess.

Thus, while these adults admitted they did not read anything related to politics and rarely watched the TV news, they had formulated strong opinions about the political system and had opted not to participate.

Literacy Goals and Convictions

At the time of the study, 24 of the 26 mainstream society adults were enrolled in a literacy/academic upgrading program while only 16 of the prisoners were enrolled in such a program. However, one of the prisoners was enrolled in a trades course and 2 were engaged in self-study. The differences reflect the manner in which the samples were chosen since most of the mainstream society adults were chosen from literacy programs. Those prisoners who had not chosen to enroll in a literacy or academic upgrading program had not done so for a number of reasons. Some of the reasons were pragmatic. Three prisoners referred to the low pay that was received for attending a school-type program in contrast to the pay received for opting for various prison jobs. One prisoner who was on medication did not think he had the energy to learn. Another (practically a non-reader), who had

been in prison on several occasions, indicated that he survived in prison by establishing his role as "tough guy". When the prison population changed and he felt his reputation was no longer widespread, he beat up on someone to re-establish this role. He would have preferred to serve his sentence in solitary. As he indicated, there was no way he was going to attend a literacy class and expose the fact that he couldn't read or write. The remaining subjects also did not enroll because of a self-image. They considered the literacy program, the "dummy class" because they felt that anyone who enrolled must be "stupid" and they were not prepared to be identified with it.

There were many differences between mainstream society adults and prisoners who had enrolled in programs in terms of future goals. Four of the latter were more inclined to see education as a stepping stone to a secure job. There was also a large number of mainstream society adults (approximately 25 percent) who were attending literacy classes to help them feel good about themselves as people, to feel comfortable within the larger society in terms of meeting their literacy needs, or to provide a better environment for their children or grandchildren. A small number of both groups had no plans. The three mainstream society adults in this category had been "sent" to the programs by a social worker or social welfare agency. One adult expressed his goals this way, "I don't know. Just get a half-ass job - anything that's steady." When asked how the present program

would help him in achieving his goal, he said he was not sure. Another was content with "jumping bins" (searching garbage containers) on the weekends. The four prisoners who said they had no goals were content to "drift along."

While mainstream society adults and prisoners differed in the nature of their expressed goals, an even greater number differed in response to the probing about the convictions of their responses. The majority of the mainstream society adults were rather convincing in their goals and in expending the necessary effort to attain them. One adult said, "I've waited to go to school for 30 years but never really had a chance. This was the first winter I got some time off and I'm doing it." (This adult was driving approximately 100 kilometers a day to and from classes. He had heard of this opportunity from his wife's sister's nephew who had attended a similar class). This adult hoped to advance on his job. In discussing his reasons for enrolling, he said, "It (more education) will take a lot of embarrassment out of life for me. I haven't been able to get my certificate although I know I'm qualified. They tell me that my eyesight isn't good enough but I know that airplane pilots can work with glasses. I know that when I retire, my previous five years of salary will count for my pension and getting my certificate will increase my salary considerably. As soon as I get my education, I'm going to feel competent to go and argue my point. Right now the language they use confuses me." Another adult said, "I want to get married but

I don't want to get married and have kids who will have to go through what I went through. Right now I don't feel confident to look after someone. I need to get a job and money and get back into society. Right now let me tell you it's a pretty lonely existence."

As the convictions of the prisoners' goals were probed, the majority of them admitted they really had no definite goals, or actually had one very definite goal - to get out of jail. Yet all but one were repeat offenders, some having been in jail off and on for 10 years. They had no definite plan for staying out of jail. In fact, several were fatalistic in their thinking and figured their chances of staying out of jail would be very slight. Yet their main goal was to get out. One person expressed it this way, "When I get up in the morning and even the last thing before I go to sleep at night, I think about getting out of here. I count off the days. I go to class but most of my energy (mental) is taken up with being on the outside. That's all I can really think of. It's a real downer when a guy gets a setback (in reference to someone whose sentence had been increased)."

Discussion and Implications

Johnson (1985) states that "most current explanations of reading difficulties focus on the level of operations devoid of context, goals, motives, or history" (p.175). Remedial reading programs are also often focussed in this way. The findings of this study support Johnson's beliefs

that context, goals, motives, and history must also be considered in literacy program development.

Since the mainstream society adults and the prisoners operated within different sociopolitical contexts, it would follow that they would be characterized by differences regarding their literacy lives. However, a brief history of both groups showed that differences had existed long before the 26 of one group had become prison inmates. As high school students, the prisoners tended to have more difficulty in conforming to school procedures and requirements. They were more likely to be in conflict with school personnel and tended to drop out of school at an earlier grade level than the mainstream society adults. While they were similar to the mainstream society adults in terms of occupational goals while in school, they did not do as well as the latter in work situations after leaving school and none of them had ever been happy in the jobs they had held.

The mainstream society adults had accessed a much wider range of strategies in meeting their literacy needs as compared to the prisoners. The latter were more inclined to engage the help of someone they trusted, even if this meant holding a letter received for up to two months before getting someone to read it. The prisoners exhibited fewer appropriate strategies in dealing with consumer situations with which they were not happy and often resorted to force to try and resolve such situations. Also, they were less knowledgeable of political leaders than were the mainstream

society adults and had participated less in exercising their right as voters. However, they were aware of political issues, particularly if they saw a connection between these issues and their own lives, and had much stronger opinions (negative) about the political process than did the mainstream society adults.

At the time of the study both groups tested at approximately the same grade level on a reading achievement test. Reading achievement is often the main criterion for deciding on the kind of literacy program most suitable for adults; that is, the focus is on cognitive skills. Rigg and Kazemek (1983) lament such decisions. They argue that when cognitive skills become the basis of a literacy program, and when the teacher acts as diagnostician, prescriber, and controller regarding what should be done to adult learners, and how and when, "Is it any wonder that programs fail to retain many of their subjects? Adults quickly realize when their goals, plans, world views, and beliefs are given little serious consideration by teachers." (p. 26). Thus it is important that literacy programs have greater meaning for adults' lives than an increased competency in reading and writing skills only.

The mainstream society adults expressed a range of goals. While some hoped that improvement in literacy would lead to a job, there were others who wanted to feel good about themselves, to feel that they were as good as others, and not to feel ashamed about themselves in situations

involving print. The research of Amoroso (1984) and Pillay (1986) also identified "literacy as self-fulfillment" as the most recurrent goal of low-literate adults. As Amoroso explains, "Most were seen as individuals striving to develop a better sense of themselves. They were people who . . . had been trapped in what Freire (1970) has labelled 'a culture of silence', unable to overcome their sense of inadequacies with respect to other people" (p. 11). Amoroso also suggested that this feeling of inadequacy often resulted from their treatment by teachers during their school years. As adults, he says, many of them "went through bitter struggles to avoid embarrassments that confronted them" (p.13). The documentation of coping strategies in this study is an indication of the intelligence and ingenuity of these adults in avoiding such embarrassments. Adult literacy program developers must be aware of the goals of the adult learners for as Thistlewaite (1983) suggests, "the presence of a goal greatly increases the chance of success" (p. 16). Consideration of such goals would necessitate that adult educators involve adult learners in program development as recommended by Rigg and Kazemek (1983).

Many of the adults of this study, particularly the prisoners, and those mainstream society adults who were referred to programs by mental health or social workers, did not express any particular literacy goals. Thistlewaite (1983) says that "It is the responsibility of the adult educator to encourage goal setting by the students who have

not already established their goals" (p. 16). However, a more basic issue is whether all low-literate adults should participate in literacy upgrading programs. It seems more appropriate that the issue of goals be raised during counselling of the adults regarding their enrollment in the program. The best decision for these adults with no particular goals may not be that advocated by Fitzgerald (1984) who believes that all low-literate adults should be legally bound to attend classes since by their inaction in developing literacy competency, they cause financial harm to others (p. 197). She reports a study of her own which showed that adults referred to programs by courts, probation officers, and rehabilitation sources, etc. (adult learners whom she refers to as 'pawns') learned within these programs. Fitzgerald, however, seems to be missing a more fundamental issue - the context in which these individuals live and the use of literacy within that context.

With regard to prison environments, Nixon and Bumbarger (1983) maintain they encourage "passivity, compliance, and inertia" (p. 5). In such an environment it might be difficult for the low-literate adults to display a sense of self-direction, a quality which Knowles (1980) says is a crucial characteristic of adult learners. This is especially so if literacy programs in which they are enrolled, have little meaning for their lives. A more profitable route for adult educators would be to take Heath's (1981) suggestion of

starting with the adult learners and finding out the place and significance of literacy in their lives.

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CHAPTER 9

ADULT LEARNER SOCIAL NETWORKS: IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY PROGRAMS*

Illiteracy is variously described as being an academic, social, political, economic, and even an ethical issue. Yet, it seems that most literacy programs focus only on the academic aspect. Knowles (1984) has pointed out that adult learners tend to be "person oriented" rather than "subject oriented" (p. 407). Fingeret (1983) cautions that "as long as literacy programs continue to publicize a homogeneous image of inadequate, dependent, illiterate adults, we will continue to attract only a small number of potential participants" (p. 142), and of those attracted, many may decide to withdraw from the program (Cross, 1981). Therefore a problem facing literacy educators is to get to know the adult learners as people.

Adult Learners and Social Networks

In what may be described as a seminal study in the area of adult literacy, Fingeret (1983) described low-literate adults in terms of the social networks to which they belonged and pointed out the implications for literacy development. Through an indepth study of 43 adults in an

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urban setting in the Northeastern United States, Fingeret identified two distinct social networks. She labelled one "cosmopolitan" and defined it as being fairly open, comprised of adults who were successful financially, worked in public roles, were comfortable with the demands of the larger society, and could actually pass as being literate. The second network, she labelled "local". This represented a fairly closed system and consisted mainly of close-knit groups marked by family ties, co-workers, or individuals from an immediate geographic area of the city. The individuals within this network looked inward toward the particular group and were limited in their social contacts and civic involvement. They tended to hold low paying jobs.

Fingeret further indicated that these networks were characterized by "trade-offs"; that is, various individuals had different skills to offer, including literacy. By trading one skill for another (I'll fill in that form for you while you fix the lock on the door), the adults were able to easily manage in terms of their literacy needs. However, the fact that one-half of the adults in Fingeret's study were enrolled in literacy programs and that many others had previously attended such programs, would indicate that inter-network relations were not in the degree of harmony that Fingeret suggested. Many, obviously, felt it was necessary to move outside their networks for their literacy needs.

The purpose of this study was to determine if Fingeret's "networks" applied to a more diverse group of 52 adults, one half of whom were prison inmates. The remainder who were termed "mainstream society adults" included a number of inner city residents. The mean chronological age was 25 years, the mean reading achievement level was approximately a mid-grade 5, the average number of years spent in regular school, 11, and all were at least of average intelligence. The prison inmates and mainstream society adults were similar across these factors.

Social Networks

Just over one-half of the mainstream society sample could be considered **locals**. The number of cosmopolitans was small - actually 2. One, although functioning at a very low level of literacy (around grade 1-2 level) held an executive position, was making over $60,000 a year, had several investments, had a number of professional friends, was a member of exclusive clubs, and travelled widely for his vacations. At the time of the study he was on his way to Hawaii on a scuba diving trip. The other cosmopolitan owned several branches of a particular business and was now extending into another field.

A third subgroup was identified among the mainstream society adults; this subgroup was labelled **transient.** This label is not intended to mean temporary physical/ geographical stability, although it was common for members of this group to pack up and leave without notifying the

program instructor, or even a landlord. They were also transients in a mental and emotional sense. They were all single people, although some did live with a companion. They had not established any "roots", were often on welfare, and had had, or still had a drug or drinking problem. They were usually referred to a literacy program by a social welfare or mental health agency. While many of these were inner city residents, this was not always the case.

The prisoners made up a distinct group and were referred to as **restricteds**. They were restricted in the sense that they were generally cut-off from mainstream society contacts, activities, and pursuits. For example, unlike the mainstream society adults, they did not read to their children, become involved in their children's schoolwork (although they talked about their children), shop, or even choose the TV program they would watch. Within prison they were restricted in terms of when they did things (getting up, eating, etc.), freedom of movement, their access to various items, eg. scissors. When one prisoner had to cut shapes from a sheet of paper, he had to trace it over and over with a pen until it cut through. They were also restricted in their social contacts with others (some never had visitors); they had no choice over cell-mates. Those who had served the longest sentences told of the difficulty in getting used to new cell-mates. They sometimes accepted "child-like values". For example, stars were awarded for neatness on the "tiers" or "ranges" and a tier rep who was

interviewed told of the great pride he took when his tier was awarded a star. He made the star out of colored paper in the manner described above. Prisoners in the active treatment unit told of having family pictures taken from them when it was considered that the presence of such pictures caused too much upset.

Goals, Commitments, and Circumstances

The social network groups differed on three factors: goals, commitments or convictions, and life circumstances.

As might be expected, the **cosmopolitans** were secure financially and socially. Contrary to other studies, these adults were not worried about others discovering that they had problems in reading or writing. The executive said that if he were to tell his boss that he had such problems, the boss would simply tell him to get more secretarial help. His goal was to be promoted to senior executive and for which he knew he needed to improve his reading and writing. The other cosmopolitan was planning on diversifying her business interests and wanted to become familiar with additional business ventures. There was no doubt that the cosmopolitans had clearly defined goals and life circumstances were definitely in their favor. While one appeared to have made a commitment to attaining her goal, the executive rated his commitment much lower; he wondered about the amount of work involved in becoming a good reader and writer, and the time that it would take from his business and social interests.

The **locals** were similar to the cosmopolitans in that they usually had definite goals and a strong sense of commitment. One adult, for example, told of how she had to quit highschool and how she always dreamed of returning to finish her schooling and become a nurse or nurse's aid. Now things were "right" in her life to take this step; her children were in school and she could see how she could manage financially. Even though she talked of this decision as a "big step", one couldn't but feel that she would succeed. A second local who enjoyed composing music in his spare time had withdrawn from a literacy program to travel Europe. On his return he had successfully challenged a ruling about his re-entry into the program and was determined to complete his high school.

However, the locals were unlike the cosmopolitans in that the nature of their life circumstances were at times, rather tenuous. They sometimes found support factors disappear and replaced by factors interfering with the pursuit of their goals. They realized that forces greater than being able to attend a literacy program would affect the improvement of their lives. While the cosmopolitans could be described as optimists, the locals could be termed "guarded optimists". Many (13) had dropped out of previous upgrading programs and they realized that circumstances beyond their control could again lead to a similar end. Whereas the goals of the cosmopolitans were success oriented, the goals of the locals were divided between between work oriented and person

directed, such as wanting to feel good about themselves, or to feel comfortable within the larger society in terms of not being embarrassed in social or other situations.

The **transients** could be distinguished from the locals in that their life circumstances were much more unstable; they were unemployed, and they did not enjoy the larger support network of family and friends available to the locals. Their goals were often stated in terms of a better future for their children or grandchildren. One single mother had enrolled in a program because she wanted to find out how best to help her young daughter be successful when she went to school. She wanted to know what books to read to her; she wanted to find out more about nutritious meals since she had heard that there was a relationship between good eating and school success. An older gentleman said he was determined that his grandson would have a better chance than he did and he wanted to find out as much as possible about learning and about schools. The transients may be considered pragmatists; they did not express a strong commitment to learning. It was as if because life had been difficult for them, they were not ready to believe that becoming a better reader or writer would change much for themselves, yet they were willing to give it a "cautious" try.

Two transients, however, were more pessimistic than pragmatic. They had been referred to a program by a social or mental health worker. One of them expressed his goals in this way, "I don't know. Just get a half-ass job - anything

that's steady." When asked how the program would help him in achieving his goal, he said he was not sure. Another was content with "jumping bins" (searching garbage containers) on weekends.

Many of the **prisoners** admitted they really had no definite goals, or actually had one definite goal - to get out of jail. Yet all but one were repeat offenders, some having been in jail periodically for 10 years. They had no definite plan for staying out of jail. In fact, several were fatalistic in their thinking and figured their chances of staying out of jail would be very slight. Yet, their main goal was to get out. One person expressed it this way, "When I get up in the morning and even the last thing before I go to sleep at night, I think about getting out of here. I count off the days. I go to class but most of my energy (mental) is taken up with being on the outside. That's all I can think really think of. It's a real downer when a guy gets a setback (in reference to someone whose sentence had been increased)."

The prisoners talked about their literacy problems nonchalantly. Unlike the mainstream society adults in general, they did not tend to "cover-up" their lack of literacy skills. When asked about this, one replied that it was possibly due to the fact that while in jail, there is no privacy and no secrets. Some indicated that they would have no hesitancy in telling a prospective employer that they could not read nor write very well. They didn't seem to

realize that this might possibly cost them a job. Others indicated that they could get along very well without literacy and one told of how he had hitchhiked and worked in several countries. (He was functioning around a grade 2 reading achievement level). What he didn't seem aware of was that there was always someone available to help him with his literacy needs.

The male prisoners frequently enrolled in a literacy program in order to offset the boredom of prison or to have an opportunity to talk to the female prisoners. They spent much of their mental energy thinking of their release and yet they knew that the chances of their being back were great. It seemed as if they saw release as a respite, an opportunity to take a breather before they served their next sentence for their next crime.

Implications

Adult literacy programs are about people. This study has extended the work of Fingeret by making us more aware of subgroups within the adult population and for whom literacy has different meanings. The labels are not meant to pigeon-hole people but to sensitize adult educators to the fact that individuals are different, yet also similar.

Rigg and Kazemek (1983) lament the fact that reading achievement scores are often the main criterion for allocating adults to programs. They argue that when cognitive skills become the basis of a literacy program, and when the teacher acts as diagnostician, prescriber, and controller

regarding what should be done to adult learners, and how and when, "Is it any wonder that programs fail to retain many of their subjects? Adults quickly realize when their goals, plans, and world views, and beliefs are given little consideration by teachers" (p. 26).

Thistlewaite (1983) states that "the presence of a goal greatly increases the chance of success" (p. 16). Literacy educators must understand the goals of the learners and should "encourage goal setting by the students who have not clearly established goals" (p. 16). Sometimes an indirect goal such as concern for children's literacy development, may be used to help the adult learner's own literacy development. For example, helping an adult select appropriate children's books, and demonstrating to him/her how these can be read to children effectively, should also help increase the adult's own reading ability. In the case of prison inmates who do not readily see literacy as affecting their lives "on the outside", more immediate goals need to be addressed. Literacy needs within the prison include corresponding with relatives and friends, completing forms for various purposes, such as requesting the purchase of personal items, or seeking medical attention, reading forms and documents relating to their sentence or to parole.

Finally, literacy educators should try and understand the learners' life circumstances. One learner was upset one day because her grade 3 son wanted money to join a computer

club at school but she didn't have the money to give him. That day she couldn't "get her mind on learning."

Literacy programs for "transients" must be very supportive. The transients of this study were fortunate to attend a learning center within the inner city which provided a warm, caring, and accepting atmosphere. The learners received individual attention with their reading and writing needs but the workers also helped provide for their socializing needs which were sometimes more important than the academic ones. The environment was flexible; they could get coffee and "just talk." Their unwillingness to make a "time commitment" to learning was respected. The present situation was ideal for them, thus pointing up the importance of providing a range of programs to meet the needs of diverse learners.

A Report from the Department of Defence Schools, Pacific (1984) notes that "Very often in their past, adult learners have known very little personal involvement with teachers. Often it is this teacher-student relationship - this personal touch - that helps break down the learning barriers of initially reluctant students, enabling them to develop a more positive attitude toward themselves and to feel motivated beyond anything they had previously known" (p. 403). A first step towards accomplishing this is to know the learners as persons.

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Synthesis (Chapters 8, 9): Literacy Interactions Within Social Contexts

School or a school-type environment represents only one of the contexts in which adults experience (or have experienced) literacy and literacy-related activities. Their world after leaving school is often very different from what they had planned or imagined.

They are thrust into situations where they are confronted with literacy tasks and with constraints and implications that vary, depending on how they have executed the various literacy demands. Conflicts over consumer transactions may be handled quite differently by different adults. Likewise, the extent to which low-literate adults participate in aspects of community life, such as keeping abreast of political happenings, voting, etc., may vary considerably. However, low-literate adults demonstrate their intelligence, ingenuity, and determination to succeed by engaging in a myriad of literacy or literacy-related coping strategies.

The characteristics of the social context of low-literate adults may reflect the social and economic conditions, and the goals or aspirations of the individuals involved. Four particular contexts or networks have been described: cosmopolitan, local, transient, and restricted. In each of these contexts, literacy development and use is related to the roles and goals of the participants.

Significant Concepts

- school environment
- community life
- goals
- coping strategies
- social contexts
- literacy demands
- aspirations
- networks

CHAPTER 10

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ADULT LITERACY: A TRAIT-STATE MODEL

The challenge in understanding adult literacy is not to propose more definitions. As has been pointed out in Chapter 1, definitions are numerous and at times, conflicting. Some attempts to define adult literacy are quite encompassing and impacting. Street (1984), for example, examines literacy in terms of autonomous or ideological models; Scribner (1986) evokes three metaphors: adaptation, power, and state of grade, while Lytle (1990) discusses literacy in terms of four dimensions: beliefs, practices, processes/products, and goals/plans. The challenge is not to propose more definitions; the goal is to critically re-examine the existing definitions in order "to see relationships more plainly, to conceptualize categories more accurately and to create greater overall coherence in a subject, that is, to integrate "its elements in a more logical, consistent, and intelligible fashion" (Millon, 1986, p. 650).

Such a conceptualization should not only provide for an understanding of the boundaries and interrelationships of adult literacy but should also provide a framework within which child literacy may be interpreted as well. As Sticht (1988/89) states, "We should acknowledge that children <u>are not</u> just little adults, and that adults <u>are</u> grown-up

children, and that some unified theory of cognitive development should be sought that includes cognitive growth of both children and adults" (p. 85).

Assuming the necessity and feasibility of providing a conceptual framework for the interpretation of adult and also child literacy, a second challenge is to determine the parameters or limiting factors of such a model. As early as 1968, Jenkinson who explored the construction of models in the area of reading, cautioned that models may attempt to encompass too many facets and therefore become unwieldy and unsatisfactory. Giboney (1979) maintained that a basic step in providing a conceptual framework or theoretical position is to establish the boundaries or phenomenal domain (P-domain) which he defined as "the collection of entities or elements that constitute the phenomena that the theoretical position addresses, is based upon, or seeks to elucidate" (p. 14). The P-domain that constitutes the basis of the conceptualization to be addressed in this chapter may be simply labelled "the nature of adult literacy" as opposed to other related facets, such as factors affecting literacy development, literacy policy formulation, or literacy programming or instruction. The framework to be developed here obviously will have implications for these other areas.

From an analysis of the papers in Chapter 2 to 9, the P-domain of a conceptual framework of adult literacy will include such entities or elements as: skill, knowledge, language conventions, function or use, concepts, attribu-

tion, interpersonal relations, contexts, and relativity. These and other elements were identified in the synthesis of the various chapters. Lytle's (1990) conclusion from a review of the literature is that two general orientations to literacy exist: literacy as skills and tasks, and literacy as practices and critical reflection. These orientations tend to encompass many of the elements to be included in the model to be discussed. However, the present model hopes to provide an encompassing interrelated perspective of adult literacy rather than of conceptualizing the field in terms of two opposing viewpoints.

A Trait-State Model

The trait-state construct is being adapted from personality theory as an organizer for understanding literacy. While trait and state may be considered interrelated, defining facets of literacy, they are neither mutually inclusive nor mutually exclusive; however, one facet is often focussed on with little acknowledgement of the existence of, or interrelatedness of the other. In Figure 1, the author tries to capture this sense of focus on one component with less emphasis on its complement.

Allport was the first to propose the notion of trait (Hergenhahn, 1990). Allport (1961) defined a trait as

> a broad system of similar action tendencies existing in the person we are studying. 'Similar action tendencies' are those that an observer, looking at them from the actor's point of view, can categorize together under one rubric of meaning (337).

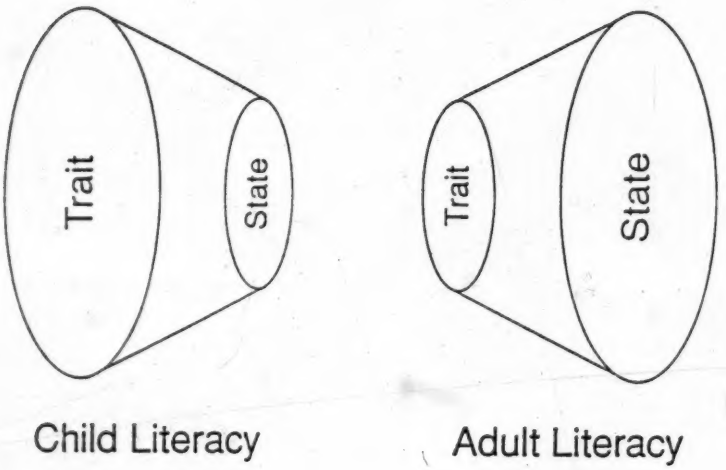

Figure 1: Focus on Trait - State Aspects of Literacy

In order to infer a trait from behavior, Allport (1961) proposed three criteria: the frequency of its enactment, the range of situations in which it occurs, and the individual's intensivity of his/her reactions in striving toward a preferred pattern of behavior (p. 340).

The trait component of literacy within the conceptualization proposed here, includes notions of skill, task, knowledge, language conventions, and language processes. The overriding characteristic is that the individual possesses language control - control over language analysis, construction, generation, meaning, evaluation and extension through manipulating various linguistic structures (word, sentence, letter, argument, thesis, clause, paragraph, con-

nective, etc.). An individual possesses this ability to a certain degree, keeping in mind that measuring this ability is not an easy task.

The trait aspect of literacy is inherent or internal to the person possessing it and tends to develop in a chronic fashion. However, it may be interrupted and reduced which may happen through brain injury, substance abuse, or with the onset of various mental disorders. While Cattell does not include literacy as one of his traits (Hergenhahn, 1990) some of his defining features of traits may be applied to literacy. One of the most important distinctions in Cattell's theory according to Hergenhahn (1990) is that of surface versus source traits. A surface trait is defined as a characteristic that correlates with other characteristics. In this sense, literacy may be considered a surface trait; other characteristics with which it correlates include "empathy, abstract context free thought, rationality, critical thought, post-operative thought (in Piaget's usage), detachment and the kinds of logical processes exemplified by syllogisms, formal language, elaborated code, etc." (Street, 1984, p. 2). Unfortunately, it is common for literacy to be viewed as a source trait, or cause of behavior; illiteracy is seen to be the cause of poverty, crime, unemployment, physical abuse (Fagan, 1990), and even ill-health (Movement for Canadian Literacy, 1990).

When the focus is on literacy as trait, little attention is given to the uses or functions of literacy. The

context of literacy use is very constrained, usually focussed on "school-type tasks", such as reading texts to answer questions, completing worksheets, discussing stylistic components of various authors, or writing journals as a school activity.

According to Allport (1961) traits interact with situations and vary according to the nature of the behavior evoked by a particular situation. He stated that "we should think of traits as ranges of possible behavior to be activated at varying points within the range according to the demands of the situation" (p. 181). Allport insisted that the whole individual - the possessing, and the doing, should never be lost sight of. Cattell (1950, 1979) emphasized the notion of state in relation to trait and indicated that one should never try to predict behavior from traits without considering the state of the individual - the mood, disposition, emotional status, etc..

Focus on literacy as state concentrates on the actual functions and uses, interpersonal behaviors, reactions, and circumstances or situations. The lives of adults involve much greater complexity than characterized their lives as children. Furthermore, adults tend to spend more of their time in the "community" - in work and social relationships, as opposed to school-type environments. Ironically, one of the failings of adult literacy programs is that they sometimes become extensions of school which the adults experienced as children rather than as integral to the

adults' present life circumstances. Kirsch (1990) maintains that "It is the difficulties individuals have with employing skills and strategies that characterize the literacy problem for much of the young adult population, not illiteracy or the inability to decode print or comprehend simple textual material" (p. 46). Focus on literacy as state is directed to providing for survival skills such as locating street names, reading medicine labels, ordering from a menu, or applying for a loan. The context or occasion becomes the controlling factor; often very little attention is given to the cognitive processes and linguistic skills which are needed to encode print integral to such situations. In fact focus on the state aspects of literacy when carried to the extreme may concentrate on individuals' rights through tenants' organizations, churches, or neighbourhood activist organizations where attention to language processing is minimal and incidental (Brookfield, 1984). The goal in such instances is that of "empowerment", defined as obtaining power over some sociopolitical economic aspect of one's life as opposed to control over a knowledge, understanding, and manipulation of language structures.

Advocates of this emphasis frequently cite Freire's notions of critical awareness and reflective thinking (Freire, 1970); what they often are unaware of, or ignore, is that Freire also has acknowledged the significance of trait aspects of literacy and has detailed a fairly elaborate syllabic method for helping learners know words

which then become the building blocks for language competency which is part of the enabling framework for critical awareness.

The Trait-State Connection

The relationships between literacy as trait and state (see Figure 2) may be best understood through drawing on constructs from the psychiatric literature. In 1938, Murray proposed the needs-press construct. Applied to the trait-state model of literacy this would mean that an individual has certain needs which involve literacy (writing a resume for a job application, understanding a memo from one's work supervisor, shopping at a supermarket, writing a thank-you note, reading a daily paper, or writing an exam). The context or situation may be kind or hostile depending on the degree of literacy competency one has in executing a particular need and the understanding one has of a particular environment or set of conditions. Literacy needs may be thwarted or met. One's reactions will be determined by and will vary, depending on the participation and outcome.

The extent to which the press of the situation is favorable or otherwise will describe the individual's state with respect to literacy functioning at that particular time. Millon (1986) provides one of the best definitions of functioning and while he coined this definition as an understanding of personality disorders, it provides a most

suitable definition for literacy functioning if one substitutes adequate literacy for healthy personality.

> When an individual displays an ability to cope with the environment in a flexible manner, and when his or her typical perceptions and behaviors foster increments in personal satisfaction, then the person may be said to possess ... (adequate literacy) .... Conversely, when average or everyday responsibilities are responded to inflexibly or defectively, or when the individual's perceptions and behaviors result in increments in personal discomfort or curtail opportunities to learn and grow, then we may speak of a ... maladaptive pattern (p. 647).

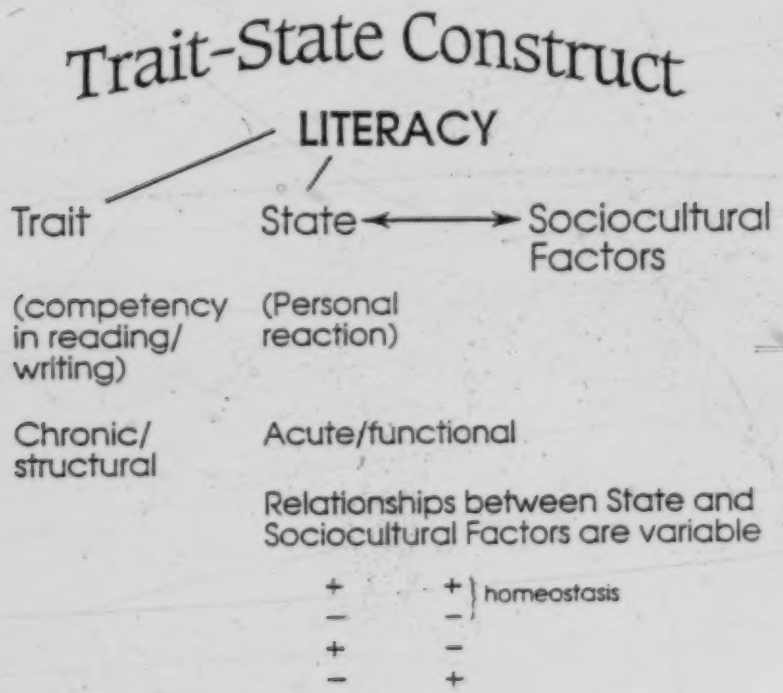

Figure 2: A Trait-State Conceptualization of Literacy

Four types of functioning, including maladaptive patterns and resulting reactions may characterize the state aspect of literacy.

1. An individual may attempt to meet a certain literacy need (for example, reading the dosage on a medicine bottle) and becomes aware that he cannot do so; he may guess at the dosage resulting in his taking an overdose with unpleasant but not fatal complications. This individual becomes aware through internal and external sources that he needs to develop greater competency in language decoding. This relationship may be labelled (++) since the individual concurs with the press or unpleasant feedback resulting from his action that literacy skills are lacking.
2. A (+-) relationship occurs when an individual decides that she would feel better about herself if she could read and/or write better. This decision may not have come from a conflict situation as in the case of the medicine example, but through observation of others, and introspection and awareness of one's functioning in written language skills.
3. A third relationship (-+) exists when an individual is informed by an external agent that he does not have sufficient literacy skills to accomplish a particular task but the individual rejects this assessment. For example, a research assistant who is hired to do a literature review may not be able to provide a syn-

thesis of the content of the various articles and comments and may have difficulty accepting this.

4. The final relationship (--) occurs when an individual does not encounter situations where meeting literacy needs is perceived as a problem, either from personal perception or through feedback from others. A (--) relationship will not only characterize those individuals whose literacy ability is adequate for the tasks encountered but also those individuals whose literacy abilities, while low (or even minimal) do not encounter situations where manipulating print is a factor. Such a relationship may characterize older individuals living within a secure family unit, those in non-skilled or semi-skilled jobs and who live in a simplified environment (away from taking buses, using banks, shopping at supermarkets and department stores, etc.). Whether this latter group is literate, low-literate, or non-literate is not an issue; for this group literacy is simply irrelevant.

The trait-state model also helps us understand contexts which may appear to be literacy based but in which meeting literacy needs is peripheral to other values. The example of community organization activist groups has already been mentioned, where power is the overriding purpose and literacy may not be a factor in meeting a particular need. As another example, consider university students (who assumedly have acquired a fairly high level of literacy

competency) who continue to cross the street AFTER the "WAIT" sign shows. Understanding and acting on this linguistic command is subservient to another need - to be on time for class, to avoid standing in the cold. A third example is provided by Bergevin (1967) who points out that adults whose basic need is to find employment, frequently enroll in literacy programs because no jobs are available and financial support is provided for participating in the program. Their main goal is not literacy but income. Finally, the model helps us understand adults who are fairly competent in literacy as trait, but who lack confidence in themselves and avoid contexts requiring literacy which they could easily handle.

The four state relationships discussed above are relative in the sense that they may vary across contexts for a single individual. For example, a teacher taking a graduate class on language development in which he/she is expected to analyze language protocols in terms of clausal units cannot function effectively if he/she does not know what clauses are. However, this teacher may have no difficulty reading curriculum materials, children's work, etc. and may function very well in the classroom. Another example, comes from a TV documentary on literacy several years ago where the program host interviewed a car mechanic with low literacy skills and from a car repair manual demonstrated that the mechanic lacked sufficient reading skills as he (the mechanic) read "bend down the rocket arm"

for "bleed down the rocket arm". Two major points were overlooked which are important in understanding literacy as state. First, it is likely that the mechanic with his knowledge of car engine parts and their relationships would realize that he was not to "bend down" the rocket arm; secondly, it would be unlikely the TV host with all his literacy skills, could read the manuals and repair cars.

Literacy Skill Transfer: Trait to State

There is a common belief among literacy instructors that competency in trait aspects of literacy is automatically available for use in particular states or contexts. Mikulecky (1990) doubts that "mastering a common core of basic literacy skills" does transfer across contexts. Two areas of research support Mikulecky's belief.

A study by the author (Fagan, 1989) with two groups of adults (prison inmates and non-institutional adults) showed correlations of .40 and .62, for both groups respectively, between tasks of an academic nature (emphasizing literacy as trait) and tasks of a state-like* nature. Similar size correlations between comparable tasks were found by Kirsch and Jungeblut (1986). These correlations are low, especially in terms of common variance. While both groups of subjects in the Fagan study had a similar achievement mean and range on academic type tasks, the relationship of this performance

* These were state simulated tasks, for example, locating information in a TV guide. To truly assess literacy as state, performance must be noted on literacy tasks in natural contexts.

to state-like tasks varied. This could be explained by greater participation in literacy activities in a variety of states by the non-institutional adults.

The second area of research which supports this belief, comes from literacy in the workplace or job related literacy. Researchers in job related literacy have pointed out that literacy development in the school does not prepare adults to participate in work related literacy. Harste and Mikulecky (1984) indicate that work type literacy differs from school type literacy in the nature of the literacy tasks and the continuity of involvement. They maintain that "Work reading calls for reading to accomplish tasks, solve problems, and make evaluations about the usefulness of material. For the vast majority of high school students ... reading was for the purpose of finding facts to answer teachers' questions" (p. 66). In addition, they found that for two groups of workers, that less than two percent of the reading time continued uninterruptedly beyond one minute. They describe reading in the workplace as "read, look, do, and ask others" (p. 66).

One reason why competency in trait aspects of literacy does not always transfer to various states is suggested by an analysis of how literacy is usually developed within a school context. Mitchell (1988) emphasizes that "Most school systems in most countries are founded upon a fundamental public interest imperative - the cultivation of a literate and educated citizenry" (p. 1) which has usually been

defined as competency in trait aspects of literacy. Greenfield (cited in Street, 1984) states that "School is isolated from life and the pupil must therefore acquire abstract habits of thought if he is to follow the teacher's oral lessons" (p. 21).

Thus, students learn how to recognize words in their reading texts, spell words as they write, formulate conclusions from their reading, construct logical arguments in writing, become familiar with a variety of genre (narrative, essay, sonnet, etc.), and study the "great" writers, on the assumption that this knowledge can be stored and become readily available for use in future contexts.

Greene (1989) who refers to trait aspects of literacy, as book-oriented literacy maintains that one reason why this aspect of literacy is perpetuated in schools is that teachers tend not to question its underlying rationale and remain blind to how literacy interacts with life; they lack "the capacity to <u>see</u>, to attend to the particulars of what surrounds" (Greene, 1989, p. 2). There exists almost a contradiction within schools that while on one hand, the emphasis on literacy is book or trait oriented; on the other, this emphasis is based on a particular ideology or political state. Mitchell (1988) points out that "Politics is literacy and literacy is political. Literacy learning is the most important function of any society's educational system. Equally as clear is the recognition that literacy content and pedagogy are shaped by a constant interplay of

ideologies and interests" (p. 2). According to Mitchell, teachers are agents of a particular authority. They enforce procedures which focus on developing literacy as trait.

A Trait-State Model: Understanding Adaptation vs Empowerment

Adaptation and empowerment (power) are two of the metaphors used by Scribner (1986) in describing literacy. These concepts, however, have been widely used by a number of other writers. Adaptation is generally defined as preparation for fitting into the status quo, while empowerment refers to critical reflection, action, and taking control of one's life. Some people would hold the simplistic belief that there is a one-to-one correspondence between trait or school oriented literacy and adaptation on one hand, and state or contextual or functional oriented literacy and empowerment on the other. Greene (1989), for example, asks, "what literacy in its accustomed guises (trait oriented) has to do with" everyday reality - "the concrete, the daily, the particular, to experiences in significant roles" (p. 3). However, as Venezky (1990) points out, literacy for adaptation also occurs in "real life" literacy contexts. As an example he states that while "training for punching the hamburger and french fry keys on the fast food cash register" allows the worker to adapt to the particular job requirements, it "is inadequate for advancement to managerial positions in such enterprises" (p. 72).

Two misconceptions may arise from the trait-state/ adaptation-empowerment equation. One is that literacy approached from a state or functional aspect is automatically empowering. The notion of power, of course, depends upon the degree of power involved. Certainly, a person who learns to read a street sign can be said to have power over knowing that location. But this leads to the question as to whether a street sign can only be learned in the proximity of a street, or whether this label could also be learned in a trait or book oriented literacy program.

A second misconception is that trait or book oriented literacy does not empower people. Delpit (1988) suggests that in a power engagement, the individuals seeking power are in a better position of obtaining power if they can meet the present power structure on their own (language) terms. A letter of complaint to city council in which sentences are ill-formed, arguments poorly presented, and misspellings and grammatical errors abound is less likely to have as much impact as a letter in which the language corresponds to that of the power structure and arguments are clearly and succinctly put. In fact Delpit sees a danger in the focus of schools on process orientations to teaching (such as whole language) through which students learn a lot about language involvement (usually using their own language as a norm) rather than on the manipulation and control over language structures that may be used as an instrument in negotiating for power. She believes that lower-class children will be at

a greater disadvantage as their language norms tend to vary most from those who hold power. Delpit (1988) expresses her concern as follows: "Teachers do students no service to suggest even implicitly, that "product" is not important. In this country, students will be judged on their product regardless of the process they utilized to achieve it" (p. 287).

Literacy is not trait versus state nor adaptation versus empowerment. Neither is literacy a matter of dependence versus independence. As Lytle (1990) proposes, literacy is a matter of interdependence and collaboration. Literacy is trait and state or trait-state, with the hyphen emphasizing the interdependence or interrelatedness. Interdependence is manifested in a number of ways. Trait aspects of literacy cannot be entirely separated from literacy as state, nor can literacy be promoted as state without addressing the question of how learners cognitively process and "know" print and language structures. Literacy cannot be "given" by a teacher/instructor nor can a teacher/instructor "make" a person literate. Literacy development must occur in contexts where interpersonal relations and responsibilities are defined through consensus and respect. If literacy is to be an instrument in attaining power, then the literacy user must have control over language for that purpose; on the other hand the power holders must be prepared to address the issue as presented via language and not resort to such tactics as responding ambiguously, blaming the victim,

evading a response, or using consensus of the elite as justification for a decision against the power challenger(s). Fingeret (1990) points out that literacy is only enabling in attempts to share power if those holding power are willing to redistribute that power.

Implications

If one accepts a trait-state model of literacy, then literacy programs (school or adult based) cannot be viewed as either trait or state, although there may be a focus or emphasis on one or the other. As Venezky (1990) states, there is no reason why school literacy should be "plain vanilla literacy" (p. 5), and while he admits there are fewer literacy states or contexts in childhood as opposed to adulthood, children are involved in diverse situations outside of school - situations in which literacy needs exist. On the other hand schools cannot ignore their mandate to assist students in becoming competent users of language, both in terms of process and product. Adult literacy programs cannot focus only on assisting adults in surviving in, adapting to, or changing a situation involving literacy, without providing for the development of language knowledge and strategy for language use.

Learners (children and adults) who are exposed to a trait-state literacy focussed program should develop more realistic concepts as to the more global understanding of reading and writing and literacy.

Accepting a trait-state model of literacy necessitates a different perspective towards assessing literacy than is prevalent at the present time. Standardized tests, which are commonly used in schools tend to measure trait aspects of literacy; however, they tend to focus only on product and often include tasks which are of minimal significance or which are peripheral to language competency. Paris (1984) suggests that assessment must identify levels of literacy in terms of tasks, knowledge, skills, and strategies.

The focus of assessment in adult literacy at present is on simulated situational or functional type tasks. In order to assess literacy as state, adults must be observed as they encounter specific tasks and attempt to meet specific literacy needs. Since this type of evaluation is not always feasible, caution should be taken in using simulated situational tasks (actually facsimiles of tasks). Certainly, the meaningfulness of these tasks to the lives of the adults must be investigated. Adult literacy should also be assessed in terms of the reactions (or symptoms) of individuals who encounter different state relationships. Publicity campaigns aimed at informing a nation that all those who function below a certain grade or other designated level need help (or at worst, are a threat to themselves and/or the nation) have little meaning for adults who are perfectly happy with their lives sans literacy.

The nature of the assessment must also consider the individual as a person. Allport (1960) was a strong believer in learning about people from people:

> When we set out to study a person's motives, we are seeking to find out what that person is trying to do in his life including, of course, what he is trying to avoid and what he is trying to be. I see no reason why we should not start our investigation by asking him to tell us the answers as he sees them (p. 101).

Allport distinguished between 'need reduction' and 'need induction' and claimed that the latter was the primary objective in life. These constructs suggest one dimension on which those who are literate and those who seek to increase their low-literacy status differ from those who are happy with their low-literacy status. The latter do not evaluate literacy against life fulfillment but against their functioning in a day-to-day situation.

Assessment must be interpreted in terms of trait and state. The nature of the assessment must be pertinent to one's literacy needs. For example, the results of a standardized reading test at the completion of high school may not be a good predictor of how well a person will cope with literacy demands in a workplace context; an assessment of a person's ability to deal with selected and representative workplace literacy demands should be a much better predictor. However, results on a standardized test may be a very good predictor of how well individuals may do in university.

Furthermore, one should exercise caution in generalizing from a single set of observations or behaviors (including test scores). This could lead to confusing traits with pseudo-traits, which according to Allport (1937) are inferred from appearances of what is, rather than what actually is.

Literacy development should be a collaborative affair, in which interpersonal relations are key. Research (Harste and Mikulecky, 1984) has shown that engaging in workplace literacy frequently involves an interpersonal sharing. Literacy development in a school or academic based program should also allow for interpersonal interaction between learners as they address literacy goals, and between instructors and students who learn to respect and trust each other as co-partners in literacy development.

Finally, the overlap of the concepts of adaptation and empowerment must be addressed. The world is never completely static (necessitating adaptation) nor always in flux (involving empowerment). Events tend to evolve so that adaptation and empowerment interact. Literacy groups or agencies must carefully examine their role in adaptation and empowerment. Adult literacy groups must recognize that activism entails a "going beyond" the status quo but to go beyond, implies a knowledge and understanding of present conditions, including language use. Likewise, schools must be flexible in providing for students with diverse values, and for those who come from different socioeconomic levels

or different cultures. Head Start programs, for example, should not focus only on changing the child, the family, and the community. The school must also change and not just in terms of offering different programs but also in accepting a different value system and adjusting its total organization in light of new values and roles.

Concluding Statement

Adult literacy, a current and significant issue, has been defined from different perspectives which have had profound implications in determining how adults function in literacy contexts and in identifying who might be interested in and benefit from literacy programs. Literacy has been addressed as an educational issue, a social issue, an economic and a political issue. There is no doubt that what adult literacy is, transcends many areas.

What is needed is a conceptual framework to help adult literacy stakeholders understand the interrelatedness of the many factors that are integral to or impinge on adult literacy, to understand when an issue is or is not literacy based. It is hoped that the Trait-State Model will, at least, constitute a beginning for such understanding.

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